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REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

A STUDY OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AMONGST OPEN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES LIVING IN
BELGIUM, GREECE AND SPAIN

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION (EdD)

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Declaration

No element of the work described in this dissertation, nor the dissertation itself, has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other institution. The work described in this dissertation has been carried out entirely by the author.

**Charlotte Hilary Bennison
P2014060
September 2004**

Abstract

This study is an investigation into what it means to be a learner in a transnational context. The research focuses on a cohort of graduates who studied with the Open University whilst living in Belgium, Greece and Spain. The impact of nationality, language and previous educational background on the experience of borderless education is explored, as well as the outcomes in terms of personal and professional development. Set within the wider framework of the development of the European Higher Education Area, the debate over the declining power of the nation-state, the growth of cross-border education and the increased use of English as a global language, the graduates in this survey are identified as both responding and contributing to the forces of globalisation within higher education.

Using a multiple research strategy including a focus group, a questionnaire and a small sample of semi-structured in-depth interviews, this study adopts an interpretative and cross-cultural approach to represent the national, cultural and linguistic diversity of the participants, and to give a voice to the plurality of their experiences.

Although this study was carried out with graduates from the Open University, the findings are of relevance to academic, administrative and student support staff in any university that offers its courses in a transnational setting.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research explores the experiences of graduates who have studied for a degree with the British Open University (OU) whilst living outside the United Kingdom (UK). The intention is to investigate the impact of studying across international and virtual boundaries from the perspective of participants who have been successful in this arena. In many cases the graduates in this survey have had to adjust to a new way of studying by distance learning, have completed their degree in a language other than their mother tongue, and in an educational and cultural context very different from their previous experiences. I am interested not only in the influence of language, educational background and cultural identity on cross-cultural learning, but also in the outcomes of this learning in terms of personal and professional development. This raises a number of questions. What have graduates gained from this experience and how have they used their learning? How, if at all, has it affected their sense of cultural and national identity? What were their original reasons for choosing to study with the Open University (OU) and have their aims and aspirations been met? Have they tried to gain academic or professional recognition of their OU degree and if so, what problems have they encountered? Set in the context of the Bologna Declaration, the movement towards a European Higher Education Area, and the development of new forms of cross-border education, the experiences of these graduates will provide an insight into the reality of studying in a transnational context.

The focus of the research is a cohort of graduates who obtained a degree from the Open University in the years 2000 and 2001 whilst living in three particular countries in Continental Europe (CE): Belgium, Greece and Spain. A rationale for the choice of these three countries follows (1:8). The term Continental Europe is used by the Open University to denote all member countries of the European Union outside the UK and Ireland, plus Switzerland and Slovenia, and constitutes the spread of countries in mainland Europe from where the Open University was recruiting its students during

the period of this study. In May 2004 the university also began to accept registrations from the new accession countries. However, for the purposes of this research the term will be used to denote the original membership of the EU prior to May 2004.

Previous student surveys

There have been two surveys of the entire OU student body in CE. The first of these surveys, in 1996, investigated student satisfaction and was carried out by the University's Institute for Educational Technology (IET, 1997). The response showed some dissatisfaction about fee levels and a feeling that students were receiving an inferior service, mainly due to lack of local face-to-face tuition and a perceived lack of value for money. In 1998 further research was carried out by staff in the Open University of the North, the Regional Centre with responsibility for the administration of the University's scheme in CE (Regan, 1998, Spendiff, 1998). Regan's study used quantitative methods to collect data from all 4,734 students who were currently studying from CE in May 1998. The survey included students on all programmes of study including undergraduate, taught postgraduate, certificate and diploma courses across all schools and faculties. This survey was the first to collect detailed information about this body of students and sought information about their nationality, origins and places of education, the languages they spoke and their competence in English, their access to and ownership of information and communications technologies (ICT) equipment and their reasons for and problems with studying with the OU. In 1999 the academic progress of the students who responded to Regan's survey was analysed (IET, 2000) and data on pass rates, retention and withdrawal was compared with that of students based in the UK. This analysis suggested that CE students succeeded in greater proportions than UK students. This may reflect previous educational attainment but it may also reflect the level of financial commitment made, and therefore an unwillingness to drop out and lose that investment.

Spendiff's (1998) paper presented qualitative data collected from the same survey and concentrated on the experiences of students living in CE and their difficulties in studying with the OU. Her paper identified both practical problems which could be overcome "with goodwill on both sides and increased use of IT and other improvements in communication" but also more "profound and intractable tensions that cross cultural and conceptual boundaries" (1998:28). These two surveys provide a useful foundation for this thesis, which sets out to explore the wider context in which these students have been studying, and takes the story one step further by investigating the outcomes for students who have completed their degree. Where Spendiff's paper concentrates in the main on the difficulties encountered by students with regard to aspects of the learning process, this thesis uses reflective hindsight from graduates who are successful exponents of the OU system.

Previous graduate surveys

Currently there is no information available about the destinations of Open University graduates living in CE. The most recent survey was carried out in 1996 (OU, 1996) but this did not include graduates living outside the UK. OU graduates feature in a major international study of graduate employment in Europe (Teichler 1996), but once again it is only OU graduates resident in the UK who were part of the sample (Woodley & Wilson, 2002). In 1999 a small survey of CE graduates was carried out by the Open University in the North (Cathrow, 1999), which focused specifically on the issue of recognition of OU qualifications. Although the response rate to this survey was small, 101 replies were received (11% of graduates surveyed), the responses indicated that official recognition of OU degrees outside the UK is difficult to obtain and graduates must invest a good deal of time and expense in seeking it. This is an issue explored in more depth in this study. It is not intended, however, that this thesis be purely a graduate tracking exercise. What is proposed is a more holistic exploration into the experiences of graduates who have studied in a transnational context; their motivations for studying, their perceptions of how studying with the Open University compared to their previous

educational experiences, their feelings about how, if at all, this experience has changed their sense of national identity, and finally, the consequences for their subsequent personal and professional development.

Relevance of research to educational professionals

The findings from this research should be of relevance to a variety of educational professionals. It will give a voice to those graduates who have successfully navigated a route to a degree through the channels of distance learning in a transnational context. It will highlight the benefits and pitfalls of learning across cultural boundaries. It will examine the expectations of students who have chosen this particular path and provide an insight into the type of student this form of higher education is most likely to attract. Finally, it will give a glimpse of the reality behind the rhetoric of the Bologna Declaration and the creation of a European Higher Education Area with its aims of increased transparency of higher education systems and improved recognition of degrees. The lessons learnt from the experiences of these graduates should be of interest to policy-makers involved in driving forward the agenda of Bologna, to academics involved in writing courses or creating educational materials for a transnational audience, to student services staff including careers advisers providing support for international students and to education professionals interested in or working on the development of transnational education. The concept of transnational education is not a new one (UNESCO/COE, 2000) but its growth over the last two decades has been rapid, and as is the case in the development of any new product, feedback from its customers can be overlooked in the rush to corner the market. Hopefully this research will take one very small step towards rectifying this situation.

Why is this research of interest to me?

My own interest in this subject arises from my job as a student adviser based in the North Region of the Open University. As mentioned briefly above, this Region is responsible for the management of the University's operations in

mainland Europe including the promotion of the University's courses and awards, the enrolment and support of students, the recruitment of associate lecturers and the evaluation of the effectiveness of learning and teaching across the continent. My work involves the delivery of educational and vocational guidance to students living in all parts of the region and requires me to act in an advisory capacity on issues of recognition of OU qualifications outside the UK. As part of a team of student services staff, our role is to offer a learner-centred, impartial, confidential and accessible guidance service (HEQC, 1995) to approximately 11,000 students, of whom over one half are living in Continental Europe. My perspective, therefore, is that of advocate rather than academic. I am required to interpret the University's rules, regulations and provision to enquirers and students, and conversely to champion their cause both internally with OU faculty and administrative staff, and externally with other educational providers, admissions staff, employers and regulatory bodies. For many students who have no previous experience of British higher education, the Open University's systems can appear overly complex. With regard to curriculum, the University offers a bewildering choice of courses and awards and permits students to construct their own degree profile. With regard to competence in the English language, the University remains resolutely true to its policy of openness as expressed in its mission statement (OU, 2002a) and leaves the onus on the student to decide whether their level of English is adequate for the level of academic study required. With regard to entry criteria, the University recommends that those students new to higher education to start with a Level 1 course on the undergraduate programme, but has no mechanism to prevent a student starting at Level 3. These examples serve to illustrate how principles of accessibility, flexibility and freedom of choice can sometimes lead to confusion amongst prospective students, and especially those from outside the UK for whom the concept of open and distance learning may be an unknown phenomenon. It is as a result of having spent many years explaining these systems to students living both in and outside the UK that I have become aware of the expectations and assumptions that the University

makes about the transferability of its courses and delivery mechanisms across cultural and geographical borders, and accounts for my desire to carry out research into this area.

My interest in the experiences of students living in Continental Europe can also be traced back to two formative periods in my life. My first degree was in Spanish, and an all-too-brief residence in Spain as an undergraduate student along with subsequent visits to European countries for both personal and professional reasons, has left me with an abiding interest in European languages and culture. I subsequently trained as a careers adviser and worked for several years as an adult adviser for a local education authority. This experience has given me an inherent curiosity about learning careers (Gallacher et al, 2002), and the routes that adults take in order to engage or re-engage in learning. In my current job I am fortunate to be sent on a regular basis to promote the Open University in mainland Europe and to attend meetings for current OU students. Listening to their stories about the impact that the OU has had on their lives, and, in some cases the subsequent frustrations experienced when trying to use their degree for career development, has fuelled my desire to learn more about the concept of transnational education and re-ignited my interest in issues of language, culture and career development. This research, therefore, is a reflection of the eclectic nature of my work experience, and that of the wider world in which the Open University is operating.

How this thesis has evolved

Having given a brief overview of this research and explained my reasons for wishing to carry it out, I now give a brief explanation of how the ideas behind this thesis have evolved. I started working on the idea of carrying out research into the educational experiences of OU graduates living in CE whilst studying for the MA in Education with the Open University, and began to explore this idea in more detail during the compulsory course on research methods, E835 "Educational Research in Action". My initial idea was to

examine the concept of lifelong learning and look at how far the rhetoric as stated in the European Commission's "A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning" (CEC, 2000) was working in practice for adult learners in different European countries. However, it soon became apparent that this could become an investigation that concentrated more on policy issues, government statements and statistics on participation rates in adult education, whereas my interest has always been more focused on the experiences of individual learners. During the pilot study for E835 I interviewed two mixed-nation groups of OU graduates in Belgium where it became clear that the concepts of lifelong learning and a learning society were not as developed there and in other mainland European countries as they are in the UK, and that this could be linked to cultural and religious beliefs as much as to government policy. I decided at this point to change the theoretical framework for my research and began to look at cultural and national identity and its influence on learning. Further analysis of the OU student community in CE as provided by previous research by Regan and Spendiff (1998) led me to the conclusion that what makes these students different from OU students living in the UK is the context in which they are studying and the tensions between their own cultural identities and the academic and cultural traditions of the Open University which are based on the teaching and learning models of a British university. These tensions can be conceptualised as tensions between the local and the global and can be found in all forms of transnational distance education that cross national and virtual boundaries. The themes for my literature review have emerged from this conceptual mapping exercise, and include the links between globalisation and higher education, the development of transnational education, the spread of English as a global language and the impact of transnational education on the individual student and their sense of national identity.

Research focus and rationale

Given the scope and breadth of my chosen area of research, I decided it would not be feasible to carry out the research using the experiences of all OU graduates living in all the countries of Continental Europe. By necessity the research would have to be limited to a small number of graduates living in a small number of countries. After considering various possibilities, I decided to focus on graduates who graduated in the years 2000 and 2001, and to choose three European countries in which to carry out the research – Belgium, Greece and Spain. My objective was to choose countries that would provide as diverse a picture as possible in order to illustrate the similarities and differences in educational and cultural experiences of the graduates who live there.

The rationale behind this choice of countries is based on information already available about the constitution of OU students within particular countries, (Regan, 1998 and IET, 2000) and also on economic, geographical and cultural factors. I wanted to include a northern European country in my selection and chose Belgium because of the interesting complexities in its education and cultural systems caused by its three linguistic communities. As a representative of a southern European country, I chose Spain because of the juxtaposition of a strong state with a heavily bureaucratised education system and a diversity of private and open and distance learning provision.

My third choice, Greece, has a similarly strong state involvement in higher education, but unlike Spain is less open to external providers or alternative forms of higher education and takes a robust stance against transnational education. Indeed, imported or franchised higher education is considered illegal (Adam, 2001). Claims for state recognition of external qualifications continue to meet resistance, and state-funded posts which require a University degree are denied to OU graduates, despite the launch in 1998 of the Greek Open University (OU, 2001).

What is known already about OU students living in these three countries?

As the country where the OU has operated the longest, Belgium has the largest number of OU graduates and currently has approximately 750 currently registered students (OU, 2002b). Regan's study (1998) found that 42% of OU students currently living in Belgium were nationals of countries other than Belgium or the UK, making them the most mobile and cosmopolitan group of students in CE. Analysis of their previous educational qualifications (IET, 2000) shows that they are also the most highly educated in CE, which may well account for the fact that student progress, in terms of successful pass rates on undergraduate and postgraduate courses is the highest in CE. The international nature of this student body means that issues of recognition are likely to occur, but the largest employer, the European Commission, looks favourably upon OU degrees.

The OU student population in Greece is the most distinctive of all the CE countries, in that the majority of students are Greek nationals. Regan's survey (1998) indicated that 67% of respondents were of Greek origin, but it appears that the current figure could be as high as 80%. The level of competence in English among Greeks is very high, though significant proportions have ambitions beyond their competence. Approximately 650 students register with the Open University each year making Greece one of the larger population countries (OU, 2002b), but student progress shows a success rate 10% below the average for CE and as a result the numbers requiring to resit exams is proportionally higher than in other CE countries (IET, 2000). Greeks appear to be willing to spend a very high proportion of their personal income on education and large numbers enquire about the OU but are deterred by the lack of official recognition of open and distance learning qualifications by the State.

Spain has a high proportion (57%) of British expatriates amongst its 500 OU students. Many students are highly mobile, large numbers are engaged in English teaching and course results are good compared to the average for CE.

There are significant numbers of students from outside Europe including the African countries, which means that language and cultural problems can arise. There are also many Anglophile Spaniards who study in order to maintain contact with British culture. State recognition of overseas examinations remains problematic and the system for obtaining recognition via equivalence is lengthy and expensive. The existence of two well established open and distance learning (ODL) providers, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) and the Universidad Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), is helpful and distance learning is a well-recognised phenomenon.

As shown above, the composition of the OU student body in each of the three chosen countries is very different, and is a reflection of the distinctive economic and social structures that exist therein. I now look briefly at some of the factors that account for this diversity.

Economic and geographical factors

Belgium is the smallest of my three chosen countries in terms of land area (30,500 square kilometres as compared to Greece with 132,000 and Spain with 505,000) but it has the highest population density (329 per sq km, compared to Greece with 79 per sq km and Spain with 78 per sq km) and is the wealthiest of the three (OECD, 2004). With a GDP per capita of €22,689 (compared with Greece with €10,653 and Spain with €13,853) and an unemployment rate of 8.3% (compared with Greece 10.3% and Spain with 14.1%), it is moving away from a reliance on heavy industries such as engineering and motor vehicle assembly to become a primarily service-oriented country. The IT and banking sectors in particular are witnessing a sudden growth and 80% of jobs are given to people who have studied business administration or engineering (Balster et al, 2001). Geographically, it is situated in the centre of the original 15 EU-countries, bordered by the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg and France, and was a founder member of the EU.

Greece, by contrast, is the poorest country in Western Europe, although in the last 10 years it has managed to reduce its national deficits and bring down the inflation rate from 15.7% in 1992 to 2.7% in 2000 (OECD, 2004). Greece has the highest percentage of its workforce employed in agriculture of any Western European country, and the economy is sustained by a massive tourism sector. Greece lies on the eastern fringe of mainland Europe, although the recent inclusion of Eastern European countries into the EU means that Greece is no longer geographically peripheral. In fact Greece's telecommunications sector has been growing and is well positioned to take an active role in the modernisation of the Balkans and Central European states. More than half the population lives in Athens and Thessaloniki, where most of the economic activity is situated (Balster et al, 2001)

Spain is the largest of the three countries, both in terms of land area and population (40 million, as opposed to Belgium with 10.24 million and Greece with 10.55 million) (OECD, 2004). Half of Spain is agricultural land yet 77% of the population live in or near the important urban areas of Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Seville. Major economic sectors are the chemical, textile, metallurgic and automobile industries, as well as tourism. Despite a healthy growth rate in the Spanish economy, there is still a high unemployment rate of 14% and salaries are, on average, some of the lowest in the EU (Balster et al, 2001).

Language

Despite its size, Belgium is a highly international country. It is divided into four different regions, has three different languages and over the centuries has belonged to France, Austria, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany. Flanders, the Dutch-speaking community accounts for 57% of the population, while the French-speaking district of Wallonia in the south of the country accounts for 42%. There is also a small German-speaking community in the east, which is made up of less than 1% of the total population. Brussels is officially a bilingual city but is dominated by the French language and is

regarded as a separate cultural zone (OECD, 2004). Twenty-five per cent of the inhabitants of Belgium are non-native Belgians, many of them working for the EU Commission or other international and multinational organisations.

Like Belgium, Spain has several bilingual and autonomous provinces. Castilian Spanish is the official language, but approximately 17% of the population speak Catalan, 8% speak Galician and 2% speak Basque. In bilingual communities, both Castilian and the regional language are taught in schools and universities (Balster et al, 2001).

The situation in Greece is somewhat simpler, linguistically, although there are two varieties of modern Greek in use. Katharevousa (purist) Greek represents a deliberate attempt to return to classical Greek and is used mostly in official documents, whereas Demotiki (demotic) Greek is used for everyday speech and in literature. About 98% of the population speak Greek in one or other variety and the main minority language is Turkish (Mackinnon et al, 1997).

Education

In Belgium, the Flemish, French and German communities have separate but similar education systems. Education is free and is compulsory from 6-18; until the age of 14 it must be full-time, thereafter it can be part-time. Belgium spends approximately 6% of its GDP on education, which is the highest percentage of the three countries under consideration (Balster et al, 2001). Tertiary education is fee-paying and is divided into two types: university education and non-university education. Just over half the 18-year-old population are in tertiary education, 20% in universities and 31% on non-university courses. Admission to one of the six universities is gained with an upper secondary school certificate and there is strong competition for places. The first cycle of two to three years leads to the award of 'candidat' (or 'kandidaat'), which prepares students for the second cycle, normally a further two to three years which leads to a 'licence' (or 'licentiaat'). The third cycle leads to a doctorate, after submission of a thesis. Students must sit

examinations at the end of each year of study; according to their performance they may be allowed to proceed to the next year, to resit or repeat a year. There is a high drop-out rate: just over 50% of university students abandon their studies without taking a degree, 25% after just one year. Just under one third complete their studies within the specified time (Balster et al, 2001). In light of the Bologna declaration, higher education has been changing and from the 2004-2005 academic year, new course programmes are to be offered along the lines of undergraduate bachelor studies and post graduate masters studies.

Greece spends 4.5% of its GDP on education, (OECD, 2004) and as in Belgium, education is free but is only compulsory from the age of 5–15. After the age of 15, students may attend a range of secondary schools or vocational training courses and eventually a range of tertiary institutions. There are three main types of tertiary education: universities concerned with the acquisition of knowledge through academic research and teaching (AEI), institutions of technological education concerned with the practical application of scientific knowledge (TEI), and institutes of vocational training which offer post-secondary vocational training at a variety of levels (IEK). Universities are all state-run, and supervised closely by the Ministry of Education. Tuition is free and degree courses normally last for four years, but some e.g. medicine and dentistry last for five. As a result of the Bologna process, legislation is currently before parliament to introduce a two-cycle system, and completion of the required changes by 2010 looks likely. Between 60% and 80% of university graduates are employed in the public sector including teachers in state schools who are classified as civil servants (Balster et al, 2001). Competition for admittance to higher education in Greece is strong, and only about one-third of applicants are successful (Adam, 2001). For this reason, many Greeks (at least 30,000 every year) decide to study abroad, with the USA and UK among their favoured destinations. In fact Greeks make up the largest European nationality from which all UK universities recruit (Mackinnon, 1997).

In Spain, education is free, compulsory and comprehensive from the ages of 6–16. The national government specifies a minimum compulsory curriculum and spends 5.8% of its GDP on education (Balster et al, 2001). There is also a large private sector with schools and colleges run by religious groups, predominantly Roman Catholics. After tenth grade, education is divided into vocational education 'formacion profesional' or 'bachillerato', which is the route taken by the majority of students. After successful completion of the 'bachillerato', students wanting to go on to university have to obtain a university preparation certificate and pass an entrance exam. There are a total of 61 universities in Spain including public and private institutions (Osborne & Thomas, 2003) and approximately 25% of 18-21 year olds enter university each year. Tertiary education is currently made up of three cycles, the first leading to a 'diplomado' lasts for three years, the second leading to 'licenciado' for a further two years, and the third, 'doctorate' involves submission of a thesis (Balster et al, 2001). However, like Greece, legislation is currently being passed to bring Spain's systems of higher education into line with the Bologna agreement.

A recent social survey into students enrolled in tertiary education in eight European countries (Ramsden, 2003) describes the different lengths of study for first cycle degree programmes and shows that the United Kingdom, in common with Ireland, has a very much shorter duration of study than other participating communities. The average length of study for full-time students in the UK is 3.1 years as compared to 6.5 years in Finland and 7.5 years in Italy.

Distance education in Belgium, Greece and Spain

Looking more specifically at the options available for adults within these three countries, who wish to study by distance learning at higher education level, either in English or in their mother tongue, it is apparent that Spain has

the greatest number of distance learning universities. The Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) provides university education by correspondence but, unlike the UK Open University, requires the same entry qualifications as face-to-face universities in Spain. UNED also offers higher education access courses for adults over 25 who do not hold the required qualifications. Other educational administrations, including the education departments for the communities of Galicia, Navarre and Valencia, have established distance education and there is a separate Open University of Catalonia - the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (EuroEducation, 2004). In Greece, the Greek Open University (GOU) was established by law in 1992 and provides distance undergraduate and postgraduate education as well as further education. Offering its first courses in 1998, it currently has 8,000 undergraduate and 4,000 postgraduate students but the word "Open" in its title does not, as with UNED, refer to an absence of entry qualifications. Approximately 24,000 students apply each year for 5,000 places (Kokosalakis, 2000) and entry is restricted to applicants between the ages of 23 and 45 years of age, without a first degree and who reside in the more remote areas of Greece (Osborne & Thomas, 2003).

Belgium does not have an Open University of its own, but students from the Flemish community can study with the Dutch Open University, which now has 6 study centres in Flanders. In 2002, approximately 2,000 Flemish students took advantage of these arrangements (EuroEducation, 2004).

Opportunities for graduates

Degree discipline and career choice are closely interrelated in all three countries. In a recent report on the employment of UK graduates in comparison with graduates in Europe and Japan (CHERI, 2001) a more professional focus and a closer match between field of study and subsequent employment was seen to be the established pattern in much of Continental Europe, whereas UK graduates were more likely to enter fields of employment more remote from their higher education studies. In Belgium

many of the larger companies offer graduate trainee-programmes of up to two years in length in order to fill gaps in the graduate's knowledge. Increasingly graduates use temporary agency work as a means of gaining a foothold in the labour market and there are official work experience programmes offered by a national placement service. There is a steady demand for engineers, computer scientists, lawyers and economists, but as in many countries, demand for arts graduates is less promising. Despite the European influence it is still not easy for foreign graduates to find their first employment in Belgium. A very high level of linguistic competence in two or more European languages is assumed and employers can choose from candidates who can offer sometimes as many as four. Many of the multinational organisations prefer to employ expatriates from their own countries (Balster et al, 2001). Belgian salaries are above average by European standards but the cost of living is also high, especially for accommodation in the Brussels area.

In Greece the greatest demand is for graduates with business and financial degrees, in particular marketing, sales and accounting. Unlike in Belgium, private employment agencies for temporary or permanent placements are illegal, and personal contacts play a major role in finding employment, especially among smaller companies. The major employer is the public sector, but in 2000, about half the labour force were employers, self-employed or family workers (Balster et al, 2001). Opportunities for foreign graduates are therefore few and far between, other than for language teachers. Fluency in Greek would be an absolute necessity. Probably the best career prospects are with multinational companies.

Spain has the highest unemployment rate among graduates (CHERI, 2001), with 10% still unemployed three years after graduation. The comparable figure for Europe as a whole is 3%. Temporary employment contracts are particularly common in Spain. Over 50% of graduates are employed in the private sector, and there is a high demand for graduates in the

telecommunications, computer programming, financial and engineering fields. Engineering graduates with fluent Spanish, a good knowledge of the English language and possibly a third European language, a high level of IT skills and specific work experience can expect to reach responsible management positions in their early 30s. Personal contacts and “word of mouth” play an important role when looking for work in Spain, and regional differences need to be taken into consideration. The Basque, Catalonia and Andalucia regions all possess their own culture, history and business styles, and in the case of Catalonia their own language, which is widely used in business and everyday life (Balster et al, 2001).

The information provided about the three chosen countries presents a backdrop and some context to the experiences of the graduates who are central to this research. Despite the perceived compression of the world (McGrew, 1992) brought about by developments in information and communications technologies and the globalising trends in political and economic culture (Beck, 2000), concepts which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, it is important to recognise the educational, linguistic, economic and cultural diversity amongst, and sometimes even within, the countries of the European Union.

Research Questions

Having described the background, focus and perspective for this research, I am now going to set the research questions that have arisen from the context and concepts described above. In all cases these questions refer specifically to OU graduates living in Belgium, Greece and Spain.

1. *How can we describe OU graduates in the three specified countries in terms of:*
 - a) *their nationality?*
 - b) *their competence in the English language?*
 - c) *their educational background?*

2. *What were the original reasons given for choosing to study with the Open University and what factors influenced this decision?*
3. *How did the experience of studying by distance learning with the Open University compare with previous experiences of higher education?*
4. *To what extent are concepts of cultural and national identity relevant to graduates who have studied in a transnational context, and how has this experience altered the way they feel about their identity? This question is posed to both*
 - a) *Belgian, Greek and Spanish nationals*
and to
 - b) *British graduates living in Belgium, Greece and Spain*
5. *What are the consequences of gaining a degree from the Open University in terms of:*
 - a) *personal development?*
 - b) *professional development?*

The first research question is central to this thesis as it helps to build up a picture of the types of students attracted to the Open University and who have been successful in their mission to gain a degree. The purpose behind this question is to look at how factors such as nationality, linguistic skills and previous educational experiences and achievements may contribute to this success. The second question explores the original motivation of this particular group of graduates, with a view to identifying which aspects of the Open University's provision was seen as catering for their needs. From the answers to these two questions it should be possible to discover the factors that made these graduates choose the Open University rather than an alternative provider. These factors may indicate themes that have to be explored at a later stage in the thesis, but initially these questions indicate the need for a review of the literature on the development of transnational education, the growth of English as a global language and the wider theme of globalisation and its impact on higher education.

The third question investigates experiences of higher education, and encourages a comparison between traditional face-to-face teaching and distance education. Some of the graduates in this research will have

encountered both the British approach to teaching and learning and also that of other countries. This question highlights the need for a review of the literature on distance education and pedagogy within the higher education sector.

The fourth question raises the concept of identity, and in particular national and cultural identity, and looks at whether these can change as a result of immersion in an educational system from a different country. The question will be posed to both British expatriates and natives of Belgium, Greece and Spain. A review of the literature on identity and the impact of education on identity will be carried out.

The final question explores the issues of personal and professional development among graduates and raises the issue of professional recognition of OU qualifications. This theme is central to the idea of a European Higher Education Area and is a priority task in the Bologna process. The responses to this question will contribute to the ongoing debate about the purpose of higher education, and in particular the impact of transnational higher education on the economic profile of nation-states.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis, explained its focus and parameters, and given some background information about the researcher and her rationale for carrying out the research. It has uncovered themes for further exploration. The next chapter sets the research into a wider context.

Chapter 2: The Wider Context

This chapter will examine the wider context for this research. In the previous chapter I explained how the research questions arose from my interest in the experiences of OU graduates living in Belgium, Greece and Spain, and I gave some background on the educational, linguistic and cultural differences between these three countries. In order to understand more about why these graduates chose to study with the Open University it is important to appreciate the educational and economic environment in which the Open University is operating, as a provider of distance education in both Europe and across the globe, and the reasons for the growth in demand for distance education.

This chapter is divided into two sections. I begin by looking internally at the development of the Open University as a provider of supported distance learning across mainland Europe, the relevance of the Bologna Declaration on the University's activities, and the spread of the University's provision across the world. Secondly, I examine the reasons behind the growth of the higher education sector and more specifically the growth in demand for global distance education.

The Open University in Continental Europe

The Open University was founded in 1969 with the aim of enabling those with few or no qualifications to obtain the advantage of a university education. Its mission is to be "*open as to people, places, methods and ideas*" (OU, 2002a). The "openness" in the mission statement refers to the fact that there are no entry requirements for undergraduate level study, there is no limit to the time a student can take to complete their first degree, and there are no restrictions when it comes to choosing courses with which to make up a degree. The declaration that the University is "open as to places" referred initially to the fact that the Open University is not a campus university and that learning takes place at a distance from the institution. The University was

set up initially as a national institution with funding from the British government, with a view to meeting a national rather than an international need.

Until the early 1980s the University restricted admission to students resident in the UK and ensured that condition by only mailing course materials to UK addresses. However, the demand for the University's courses from students resident overseas began to be felt in the early 1970s, especially among British services personnel stationed in Germany and Cyprus. These students with British Forces Post Office (BFPO) addresses were granted the status of a "special scheme". In 1982 another special scheme was introduced for 32 students resident in Belgium. These students were mainly British civil servants or their partners who had moved to take up positions with the European Commission or other international agencies. Students in similar positions in Luxembourg and then in The Netherlands began to ask to join the scheme. The story of the Benelux special scheme is told in more depth in an internal OU publication written by Helen Tavola, an associate lecturer based in Belgium (Tavola, 1993).

Tait (1994) provides a detailed history of the development of the Open University from a national to an international institution. He estimates that by 1993 there were about 1750 students (apart from those on special schemes) who were resident outside the UK but studying with the University by making use of UK accommodation and forwarding addresses. As the demand for permission to study from outside the UK grew and the number of special schemes began to multiply, the University gradually began to relax its residence qualification. Different regional centres were given responsibility for supporting students on different special schemes; students in the Republic of Ireland were admitted through the Belfast Regional Centre, students on the Benelux scheme were admitted through the sNewcastle Office and BFPO students were admitted through the West Midlands and Leeds offices. At the end of 1993, the responsibility for the whole of the Continental European

scheme was located in the Newcastle upon Tyne office. In 1994 a total of 3575 registrations were received from mainland Europe and the OU had become an international provider;’ international at least in terms of the range of its delivery across nations. Tait raises questions about the commitment of the OU to the internationalisation of the curriculum, and queries the extent to which a large distance learning institution can be confined to one nation-state (1994:93). He broaches the argument about the need to protect national education systems from international free market provision, given the important role that education plays in the cultural make-up of a country.

Tait identified four categories of students amongst this new European scheme (1994). The first group, first-language Anglophones, comprised mostly British expatriates, with some Americans and Canadians, and smaller numbers from Australia and New Zealand. These students chose to study with the Open University either because they were planning to return to the UK at some time in the future and wanted British qualifications, or, if they were long-stay or permanent residents, because the OU represented a link with home and British culture. The second group, an Anglophile community, consisted of local people who had an affinity or professional interest in British culture and education, for example German teachers of English. Thirdly, there was a strong Anglophone business and scientific community, often working for international companies in which English was the language of work and for whom the Open Business School programmes were particularly attractive. Finally, there was a more amorphous group of local young people with good English as a second language who chose to study for their first degree with the Open University rather than attend their local university, for a variety of reasons. This early typology will be applied to the graduates in this survey at a later stage in this study (6:146).

There are now approximately 5,900 students living in all countries of CE registered on over 300 different courses (OU, 2002b). Given that it takes an average of six years to complete a Bachelors degree with the OU, it is only

since the late 1990s that there has emerged a sizeable body of OU graduates who studied and completed their degrees whilst living outside the UK. Figure 2.1 shows the rising number of graduates in CE since 1982, classified according to the type of degree.

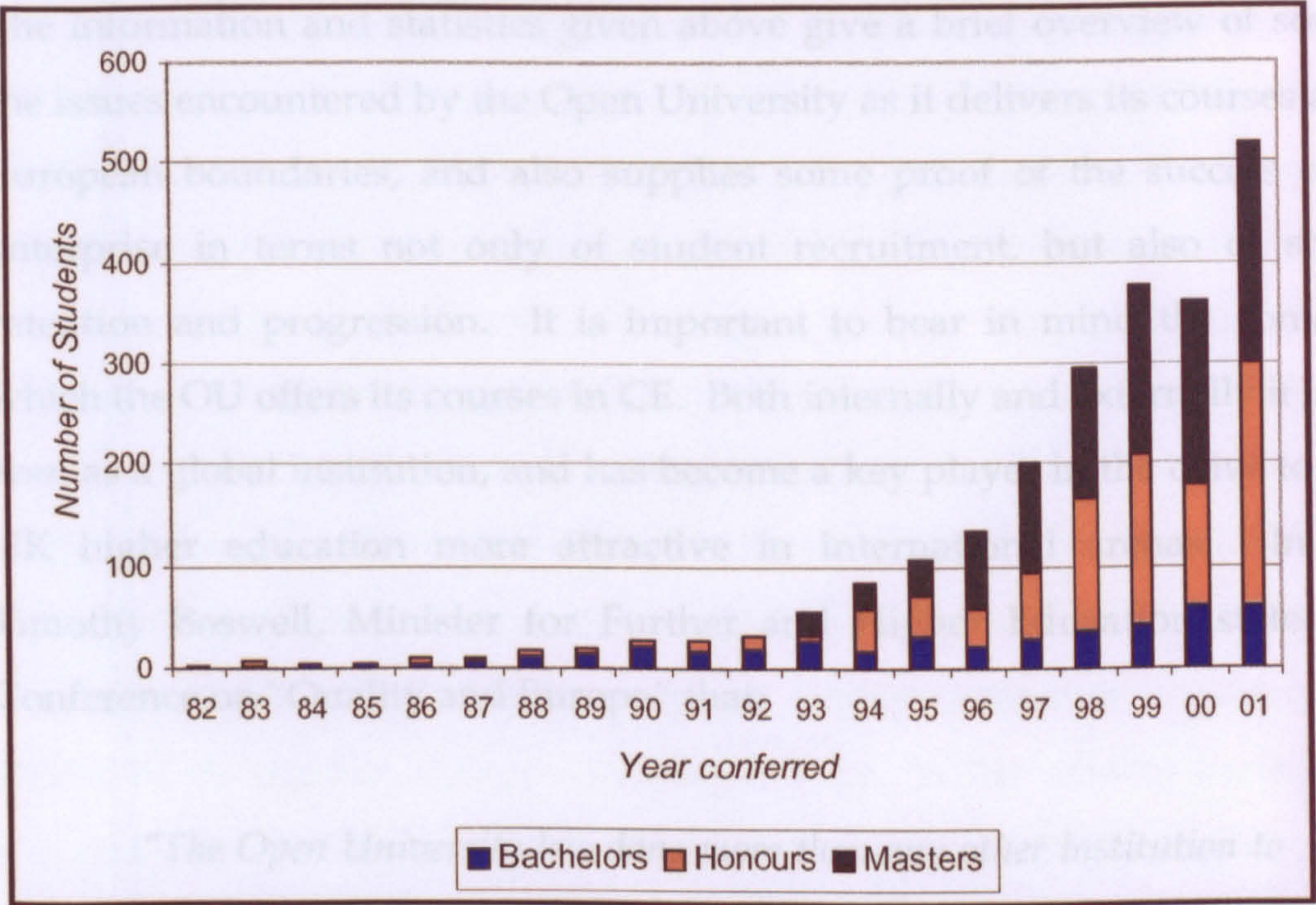


Fig 2.1 Numbers of OU graduates in Continental Europe
Source: OU (2001)

Fee structure

Delivering high quality supported distance learning at an extended distance is expensive and not helped by the decision taken in 1999 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England that students resident outside the UK but studying with a UK university would not be fundable. As a consequence the University has had to charge additional costs to students resident in CE, which means that in some cases, the CE fees are more than double those charged to UK-based students. In 2004 the average CE fee for a 60-point undergraduate course is £1,060 whereas the UK fee is £450. Unlike in the UK, there is no automatic financial assistance scheme for students resident in CE

who are unemployed or on low incomes, which means that the Open University is not as “open” to students living in CE as it is to UK residents in terms of its accessibility to all, irrespective of income.

The OU in the context of the UK Government’s agenda for higher education

The information and statistics given above give a brief overview of some of the issues encountered by the Open University as it delivers its courses across European boundaries, and also supplies some proof of the success of this enterprise in terms not only of student recruitment, but also of student retention and progression. It is important to bear in mind the context in which the OU offers its courses in CE. Both internally and externally it is now seen as a global institution, and has become a key player in the drive to make UK higher education more attractive in international arenas. In 1993, Timothy Boswell, Minister for Further and Higher Education stated at a Conference on “Quality and Europe” that:

“The Open University has done more than any other institution to make the UK the main player in Europe in the field of open and distance learning” (QSC, 1994).

The present UK government has given considerable political backing to the promotion of British higher education internationally through the Prime Minister’s Initiative, which was launched in June 1999 (British Council, 1999). Although aimed primarily at the recruitment of overseas students to study at UK universities, there was also a clear message of support for the delivery of UK higher education abroad, through distance learning, franchising and licensing arrangements. The philosophy behind this initiative was that those who experience UK education and training tend to become lifelong friends of the UK and through them, substantial political, trade and economic benefit can be gained in the long-term. The UK Government has provided help and support to the Open University in the promotion of its courses in mainland

Europe through the British embassies in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Madrid and Athens (OU, 2002b).

The European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Declaration

Extending the context of this research to developments in higher education provision within Europe, it is apparent that there have been major changes in the last four years as a result of the Bologna Declaration of 1999 (Bologna, 1999). This declaration, agreed by 29 European governments, committed the signatories (of which there are now 33) to a gradual convergence of higher education systems in Europe and urged greater action in the field of recognition of academic qualifications. The principle aim of the Declaration was to set up a process that would move towards the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Among the implications of the Bologna Declaration will be greater student mobility both within and outside the EHEA, increased transparency of higher education systems, and improved recognition of degrees within Europe. Wider student participation will result in more competition between universities, more vocational courses and the development of transnational education systems. Specific objectives include reform of the degree structure to produce an agreed two-cycle structure of three years for a bachelors degree followed by a further two years for a masters degree. Discussions are currently underway to introduce an agreed third cycle at doctoral level. A critical issue in the Bologna agenda is the expectation that first degrees will be of relevance to the labour market. The design of UK first degrees already meets this criteria and it is the norm for UK graduates to leave higher education after completion of the first cycle and enter directly into employment. This is not the norm in mainland Europe, where only 17% of European Institutions of Higher Education expect students to exit the system after the first cycle (Davies, 2004).

Progress towards the Bologna Agreement

A summary of the progress that is being made towards the European Higher Education Area was published in 2003 (CEC, 2003) and identified widespread

support for the reforms among heads of higher education institutions, but far less awareness among the representatives in those institutions who will have to implement the reforms i.e. academic and administrative staff. Some resistance to individual aspects and the pace of reform can be found, in particular, in France, the French-speaking community of Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, and the UK. An article in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (Osborn, 2004:12) confirmed that Belgium has been identified as “one of the small number of countries regarded as laggards in the Bologna process”. The problem is caused by the fact that in both the Flemish and French communities, a “candidature” (1:12) which is awarded after three years of study at a Belgian university is seen as an intermediate qualification which indicates that a student is ready to go on to further study, but is not seen as a formal qualification providing access to the jobs market. In Greece and Spain a two-tier system of higher education has been adopted, although in Spain there is still some debate about whether first cycle degrees should be three or four years in length.

The Open University and the Bologna Declaration

Three of the key objectives of the Bologna Declaration that are of immediate relevance to the Open University are:

- a) the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement. The Berlin communiqué (Berlin, 2003) set the objective that “*every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge*”
- b) a higher education system based on two main cycles: undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle will require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years.

- c) establishment of a system of credits, such as in the European Credit Transfer system.

Although the present structure of the Open University's awards system could be said to be an approximate fit with the proposals for the European Area of Higher Education, it would be dangerous for the University to become complacent. There are several areas of the University's structures and procedures that will need modification if it wants to meet the stated criteria. There needs to be greater clarification about its professional updating courses, for example the Postgraduate Programme in Computing for Commerce and Industry, which leads to the award of a Masters degree without the prerequisite of a Bachelors degree. There is the issue of how the OU will adapt its current academic transcript to meet the design of the Diploma Supplement, without which our graduates both in CE, and those in the UK wishing to use their qualifications in CE, will be at a substantial disadvantage. The University also needs to take action on the adoption of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). It is estimated that two-thirds of higher education institutions across the EU, and between 25%-50% of UK universities (CEC, 2003) are currently using ECTS, but the system was designed originally for the mobility of students from conventional universities under the Erasmus scheme, and therefore there are aspects of the system which are not appropriate for OU students (Cathrow, 2004). Finally, there is a substantial amount of work to be done on aligning the UK measurement of workload (1200 hours for a full undergraduate year) to the average measurement in European universities of 1600 hours per year (Reichart, 2004).

The Open University as a global player

Within Europe, the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) was set up in 1987 to represent and foster cooperation between the European open and distance learning universities (EADTU, 2004). The Association has 20 national members from 19 countries collectively providing

distance education programmes to over 900,000 students. There are six major providers of university level distance learning in Europe, as shown in Figure 2.2:

Organisation	Country	Number of students
CNED Centre National d'Enseignement par Distance	France	100,000
Fernuniversitat	Germany	50,000
Universidade Aberta	Portugal	5,000
Dutch Open University	The Netherlands	21,000
UNED Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia	Spain	168,000
The Open University	UK	210,000

Fig 2.2 Major providers of tertiary level distance learning in Europe

Source: (Harry, 1992)

These figures are approximations and do not include the smaller providers such as the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and the most recent newcomer, the Greek Open University in Greece (1:15). However, the UK Open University is clearly the largest provider of university level distance learning in Europe. It is also the largest exporter of transnational education in the UK (CEURC, 2001). Much of UK exported transnational education tends to be through partnerships (franchising/validation, articulation and locally supported distance learning), or through distance learning per se, and tends to be first cycle, although the demand for second cycle postgraduate awards is growing. Apart from the traditional provision of external degree programmes such as those offered by the University of London, many UK universities are now offering a range of distance learning courses, of which business administration and management, computing, health, education and human resources are the most popular subjects. None of these providers, however, operate on the scale of the Open University.

In terms of the spread of countries where it is offering its courses, the Open University is gradually moving towards becoming a global institution. From its first ventures into offering a limited number of courses in a small number of European countries to a largely Anglophone audience, it now has over 25,000 students taking courses in 94 countries outside the UK (Daniel, 2002). However, in terms of meeting Mason's (1998:11) criteria for providers of global education, it still has some way to go. She identifies five elements that characterise global education:

1. Students in more than two continents of the world able to communicate with each other and with the teacher
2. An express aim to attract international participation
3. Course content devised specifically for transnational participation
4. Support structures to tutor and administer to a global student body
5. Operations on a scale of more than one programme, and more than one curriculum area, with more than 100 students.

Although the Open University could be said to meet the criteria for the first and last elements, it cannot be said to be meeting the requirements for the second, third and fourth, or if so only in a limited capacity. Most of its delivery is still designed for a Western audience with the exception of some of the Open University management courses that have been tailored to meet a specific need in Eastern Europe, Singapore and Hong Kong. There are a very small number of courses that have been written in conjunction with partners from other countries incorporating perspectives from other cultures, and at present only a limited, but growing number of its courses are designed for delivery across the globe using purely electronic means of support.

Daniel (1996:30) places the UK Open University as eleventh in the list of mega-universities in the world. He uses the term "mega-university" to refer to distance-teaching institutions with over 100,000 active students on degree-

level courses. The largest mega-university is the China TV University System (CTVU), which admits 300,000 students annually.

Open University students are part of a rapidly expanding higher education sector. The number of students in tertiary education in the EU has more than doubled in the last 20 years (Einarsdottir, 2002). A report from Education Australia (IDP:1998) modelled population change and participation rates to the year 2010, and then on to 2025. It showed that population growth over the next 30 years will not have a major impact on enrolments but changes in participation rates will make a much greater contribution. The study forecast that global demand for higher education places would increase from 48 million in 1990 to 98 million in 2010 and to 159 million in 2025. Open and distance learning is part of this expansion:

"Today, in industrialised and developing countries alike, enrolments at a distance form between 5 and 15 per cent of the total in many cases, over 25% in a few" (IDP, 1998:13).

Mason (1998) categorises the reasons for the growth in demand for global distance education into pedagogical, economic, demographic and geographic. A reduction in funding to public universities is leading to increasing financial pressures. A fall in the number of 18-20 year olds, the traditional client group for full-time higher education, means that universities have to look further afield for new customers and become more responsive to the needs of other types of students such as professionals requiring work-related courses to develop their area of expertise. Universities are finding themselves having to respond to increasing pressures to become more international. Given the pace of technological change in particular, they are having to adjust to the reality that their community of students no longer has a single geographical location, but may be studying from an off-shore oil rig, at home, at work, indeed from anywhere at any time (Jarvis, 2001). As a result, distance education is becoming one of the more popular strategies employed by universities to

increase their international provision. A major factor in the development of this provision is the availability of new information and communication technologies which make it easier to deliver the curriculum across national borders. However, cross-border delivery can cause tensions. Universities are facing a culture of mass higher education, a demand for an international curriculum that is more sensitive to the cultural needs of students, increasing competition from corporate and private institutions, changing forms of knowledge, and new forms of delivery.

One of the possible disadvantages of the growth of global distance education is the threat of cultural imperialism. The imposition of Western values, and predominantly those of the UK and the US, on developing countries can lead to charges of "neo-colonialism" (Mason, 1998:10), a view supported by many others:

"Westerners tend to be arrogantly uncritical of the assumptions underlying their teaching and unreflective of their fitness for teaching across cultures" (Moore, 1996:189)

The dominance of the English language in much provision, plus the tendency for Western institutions to provide courses for Third World countries justifies this accusation, but Mason believes that most institutions are now wary of this threat and there are many good examples of partnerships and joint development of courses, whereby the course team is made up of representatives of all the participating countries. The EADTU has been active in promoting the development of joint courses, one example being the Open University's course "What is Europe?" which was produced by five partner institutions from The Netherlands, Denmark, France, Germany and the UK and was translated into four languages. Mason concludes that:

"there are no simple solutions to multi-cultural distance education, and no short-cuts to providing transnational education..."

nevertheless there are financial and educational benefits.” (Mason, 1998:306-307)

The tensions identified above have arisen as a result of changes in the wider world and the forces of globalisation. These forces can be both beneficial and detrimental to the development of transnational education, and have confirmed the themes that are relevant for this research. In the next chapter, the literature on the links between globalisation and higher education, the concept of “borderless” education, the development of English as a global language and the impact of transnational education on the individual student and their sense of national identity will be reviewed.

Chapter Three: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relating to the themes identified in Chapters One and Two as being relevant to the learning experiences of Open University graduates who have studied for a degree whilst living outside the UK. The research questions as outlined in Chapter One (1:?) have also determined the subject matter under review. I start by looking at the links between globalisation and higher education and explore the concept of 'borderless education' as one of a number of methods being used to disseminate higher education across national boundaries. One of the drivers for the spread of 'borderless education' is the growth of English as a global language. The literature on this topic will be reviewed before finally focusing on the impact of globalisation, 'borderless education' and language on the individual graduate and their sense of national identity.

It may be helpful to envisage these themes as illustrated below in Fig. 3.1, as a series of concentric circles, starting with the outer ring that provides the global picture and highlights the tensions between globality and locality, moving inwards to incorporate the European dimension and the relationship between transnational education and the sovereignty of nation-states, and finishing at the centre with the experiences of the individual graduate. Slicing across these concentric circles are the sub-themes of language and identity.

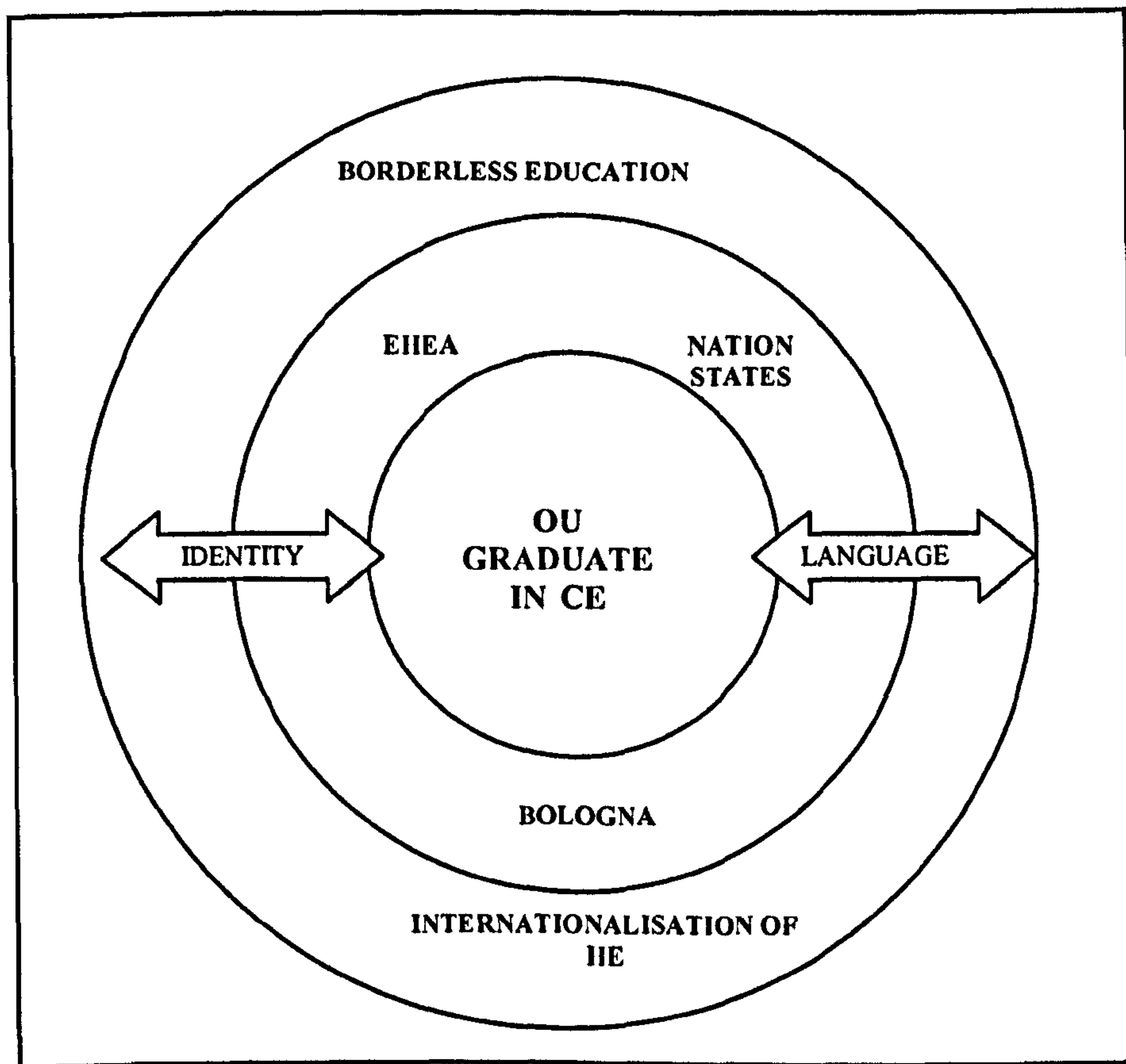


Fig 3.1
Conceptual map

Globalisation

Globalisation as an economic, political and social phenomenon has been explored at great length by many writers including Giddens (1990), Harvey (1989), Robertson (1992), McGrew (1992), Beck (2000), Featherstone (1992) and Castells (1996), amongst others. I will start by summarising some of the aspects of globalisation that have most relevance to the field of education, and will then proceed to look at the literature that concentrates specifically on the interaction between globalisation and higher education. Giddens (1990:64) defines globalisation as:

"a process through which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the world".

He sees a key feature of globalisation as the re-ordering of time and space in social life which he calls "time-space distancing" (1979:201-210), and points out that a world that allows for social interaction to be carried out regardless of place or distance is a dynamically different world from that of pre-modern cultures. Distance learning, along with the widespread use of information and communications technologies (ICT) provides a useful illustration of this concept, whereby teaching and learning no longer need to be carried out face-to-face but can become an asynchronous activity which takes place across the globe. Dialogue between student and tutor takes place without the constraint or 'friction of distance' (Hagerstrand 1975). Giddens also uses the terms "embedding" and "disembedding" mechanisms to refer to the lifting out of expert systems from their original base and their application to similar situations across the globe. In the same way that a branch of a bank will be carrying out exactly the same functions regardless of whether the institution is based in Inverness or Hong Kong, students can be enrolled on the same course at the same university regardless of whether they live in Scandinavia or the Greek islands. Through this process "*the local and the global have become inextricably intertwined*" (Giddens, 1990:258). Harvey (1989) emphasises the speeding-up or intensity of time-space compression over the last two decades, which he sees as being caused by the needs of the global capitalist economy. He draws attention to movements of resistance against the current materialism and control over space and time, which have taken many forms – religious, humanitarian and artistic. McGrew (1992) takes this theme one step further and points out that globalisation has resulted in a very contradictory social experience for many: on the one hand the universal spread of electronic media has rendered communications between different cultures astonishingly rapid, but on the other hand there is a growing sense of how particular people and their social interests differ radically from one another. People become more attached to their locality as the appropriate forum for self-assertion and democratic expression. A desire "*to preserve something meaningful and tangible in the context of profound universalising tendencies*" (McGrew, 1992:21) is what

lies behind many of today's most intense political phenomena, from ethnic revivalism and political separatism to movements for local democracy.

Robertson (1992:145) argues that Giddens neglects the fact that social and cultural differentiation has been pivotal in world history and states that the causes of globalisation are wider than just economic or political, but include the spread of Western imperialism and the development of a global media system. He contends that one of the consequences of the compression of the world must be an increase in friction between "civilizational, societal and communal narratives" (1992:14). He suggests that the terms "local" and "global" are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather that the "local" is but one aspect of the "global". He sees globalisation as a means of drawing together local cultures and redefines the concept of cultural globalisation with that of "glocalization", through a combination of the words "global" and "local"(Robertson, 1995:145). This new amalgam serves to highlight one of the main claims of cultural theory, namely that we cannot understand the contemporary world without taking into account cultural difference as well as cultural homogeneity. This paradox is central to debates about the impact of globalisation, and the ways in which it can generate "*connection and fragmentation, universalism and particularism*" (Beck, 2000:49). On the one hand there are multiple examples of growing worldwide uniformity of institutions, symbols and behaviour (for example world banks, blue jeans, information technology), and on the other there is the defence of local cultures and identities (for example the Welsh language, the Afro-Caribbean street carnival in London). The powers of nation-states are being undermined by transnational corporations, but at the same time new communities are being created on social rather than geographical grounds. One of the by-products of the changes in the global economy has been brought about by the rapid developments in information and communications technologies. Castells (1996) sums up this change:

"At the end of the twentieth century we are living through one of these rare intervals in history. An interval characterised by the transformation of our "material" culture by the works of a new technological paradigm organised around information technologies." (Castells, 1996:29)

He sees knowledge and knowledge transfer as an integral part of the new capitalism and forecasts that relationships between individuals and communications networks will eventually become more important than traditional ties to community. He talks of knowledge as being a form of raw material, a commodity that can be used to generate income and thereby improve economic performance. He identifies a move towards a core/periphery model of the labour market with knowledge workers becoming the new wealth creators. This move marks a trend towards a more polarised society with greater segmentation of the workforce.

Beck (2000) introduces the concept of "globality", as referring to the sense of living in a world society, as opposed to globalisation, which denotes:

"the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks." (Beck, 2000:11)

He argues that globality cannot be reversed for various reasons including the ongoing developments in information and communications technology, the universal demands for human rights and the issue of global environmental destruction.

"Globality means that from now on nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event; all inventions, victories and catastrophes affect the whole world." (Beck, 2002:11).

He labels late modern society as a “*risk society*” (Beck, 1992) in which institutions and individuals are “at risk” if they do not learn to cope with challenges, change and uncertainty, but points out that access to learning opportunities and survival skills may be unevenly available, causing increasing fragmentation of societies and problems of social exclusion.

So how has education been affected by globalising trends in political and economic culture? Most educationalists agree that there has been a fundamental shift in the concept of ownership of education, moving away from the idea of education being the responsibility of the nation state. Kenway (1996) argues that economic globalisation and the information revolution have resulted in an “uncoupling” of learning from its traditional institutional locations. Usher & Edwards (1994) take a slightly more extreme line and assert that global postmodernity has brought both a “crisis in rationality” and a pluralisation of cultures that fundamentally undermines the modernist goal of national educational systems. Education can no longer control or be controlled; it can “*no longer readily function as a means of reproducing society or as an instrument of large scale social engineering*” (Usher & Edwards, 1994:211). Green (1997) examines theories of globalisation and their use by education theorists, and the implications for education of recent global trends in economics and politics. He argues that “full-blown” theories of globalisation predict the end of the national economy and the nation state and the emergence of a borderless world where national cultures are transformed by global communications and cultural hybridisation. The implications of this for education would be immense. National governments would cease to control their education systems, which would gradually converge towards some regional or global norm, divested of any specific national characteristics. He makes an historical and comparative analysis of the changing role of the nation-state and national education systems in Europe, Asia and America and finds evidence to suggest that nation-states are still with us and, indeed, multiplying, and although their role may be changing they are not disappearing. In the field of education, he argues that although there is

greater international interpenetration of national education systems, this does not point towards the demise of national systems as such. Supranational bodies like the EU have limited power to interfere with national education systems, which are still seen by governments to be systems for nation-building devoted, in varying degrees, to the preparation of future workers and the formation of future citizens

Hallak (2000) sees the three major consequences of globalisation as being: firstly, the erosion of power of the nation-state by regional entities like the EU, by subnational entities and by transnational companies; secondly, the generation of both cultural diversification and simultaneous cultural standardisation; and thirdly, the segmentation and division of societies and the entire international community into those who globalise, those who are globalised and those who are left out by globalisation. Combined together these three processes are generating a reaction that Hallak portrays as “social schizophrenia” (2000:35). He sees a need for policy makers to re-evaluate the conflicting needs of different education sectors and argues for more resource to go into higher education and a greater emphasis on teaching universal values such as tolerance and human rights, respect for others and the search for a balance between society’s concerns and the integrity of the individual. Hallak’s concerns about the increasing divisions within society illustrate one of the main tensions generated by a simultaneous intensification of globalisation along with an increased awareness of cultural difference.

One of the areas of education that has been most directly affected by the impact and implications of globalisation is the field of comparative and international education (Crossley & Watson, 2003). The need to know more about the cultural dimensions of education, the recognition of the importance of context and diversity in educational research and the tensions between global and local agendas, have all conspired to resurrect the profile of this field and attract the attention of mainstream social scientists as well as educationalists. Crossley (2000:324) states that:

"it is now increasingly difficult to understand education in any context without reference to the global forces that influence policy and practice."

He goes on to list the declining power of the nation-state, the increasing power of transnational organisations, and the impact of ICT as reasons for strengthening the need for more equal partnerships between those involved in international educational development. He calls for new forms of interdisciplinary research into comparative education which cross academic and geographical borders, and which take account of context, locality and global trends. Marginson & Mollis (2002) make the link between globalisation, the growth of international markets and the numbers of foreign students crossing national borders with the increasing interest in the field of comparative studies and call for more independent comparative research which is beyond the control of governments and which is reflexive, pluralist and non-ethnocentric in nature. This renewed interest in comparative educational research could be said to illustrate one of the contradictions of the process of globalisation, which is the increased awareness of differences as well as similarities among cultures around the world. Featherstone (1992:169) sums this up well:

"One paradoxical consequence of the process of globalisation, the awareness of the finitude and boundedness of the plane of humanity, is not to produce homogeneity but to familiarise us with greater diversity, the extensive range of local cultures."

Higher education and globalisation

Jarvis (2001), Garrido (2002) and Van Damme (2002) all write about the impact of globalisation on higher education in terms of both the opportunities and the problems that it has produced. They all forecast an escalating demand for higher education, but a demand that will become increasingly specialised to cater for the professional development needs of knowledge workers. They welcome the introduction of internationalisation into higher education and the openings for cross-cultural academic networks and shared teaching. They share the same vision of new markets opening up for higher education, especially in on-line and other new forms of distance teaching, but fear that this expansion and massification of higher education will not be matched by a proportional rise in public expenditure, leading to an increase in private and commercial provision and creating huge problems of access and equity. Jarvis (2001) and Garrido (2002) both identify one of the consequences of increased private funding as a growing lack of ethical concern within universities, but whereas Jarvis talks about the resulting loss of independence and free speech, Garrido sees a growing democratisation within the governance of institutions and greater participation by all levels involved in university life as a whole. Jarvis (2001) applauds the fact that new forms of distance education have resulted in learning becoming more significant than teaching, although points out the implications of this in the changing role of the academic. He sees universities as being forced into the role of producers of materials and points out that institutions of higher education will have to learn new ways of marketing and disseminating knowledge. Both agree that there is increased emphasis and political pressure on education to become more vocational. On the issue of ownership of university policy, Garrido (2002: 42) makes the point that *"university policy, like education policy in general, remains the jealously guarded preserve of each of the nations that make up the European Union"*, whereas Van Damme (2002) identifies the emerging market for borderless higher education as being one of the most visible manifestations of globalisation. He comments on the tensions that this produces in some nation states such as Greece where there is a total

refusal to include non-national providers in the national higher education system or to recognize their diplomas and degrees (1:8)

From the literature reviewed so far, it becomes apparent that globalisation is having both a detrimental and a beneficial impact on higher education. Nation states, the traditional preserve of education systems, are being threatened by the forces of transnational provision, which are opening up higher education to a wider audience and allowing for new connections to be made across the world. Conversely, improved communications result in a convergence of populations, a greater awareness of the diversity of cultures and a desire to uphold local identity, language, and educational tradition. Gayol (1996) refers to these opposing forces as “centrifugal” and “centripetal” respectively.

I now take a closer look at the development of ‘borderless education’, as evidence of a new form of education resulting from the forces of globalisation.

Borderless education

The term ‘borderless education’ was first introduced in a report prepared for the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC) on the potential impacts of new higher education providers (DETYA, 2000). The Report “The Business of Borderless Education” was prepared by a research team at the Queensland University of Technology under the guidance of an international steering committee of university and government representatives including the AVCC and its British counterpart the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP, 2000). The report recommended the establishment of an observatory to help universities and other interested parties “keep abreast of developments in this fast-moving, complex territory”. The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (www.obhe.ac.uk) offers a range of services to subscribers including the publication of monthly reports, which provide an in-depth analysis of the major issues in borderless education. The term “borderless” is an umbrella term indicating any form of educational provision

that crosses the conventional borders of time, space and geography, and is used in this chapter to include the concepts of transnational, distance and flexible education, e-learning and other forms of virtual learning. It is also a concept that is not without problems. The Australian and British studies of 'borderless education' were motivated by concerns about increasing levels of competition for higher education institutions from outside the sector, and the general impact of change brought about by developments in ICT and globalisation trends. I begin by looking at why the demand for this new type of education has developed, and examine the advantages and threats that it poses to both national governments and traditional providers of higher education.

Van Damme (2002) highlights the transition to a knowledge society as the main driver for the increased demand for higher education and even more highly skilled knowledge workers. He identifies the demand as being mainly for certificated courses in vocationally orientated subjects such as IT and business management, and for flexible delivery mechanisms to meet the needs of lifelong learners. He predicts that many local institutions and governments will not be able to meet this demand, particularly in the ex-Soviet Union countries and the Southern hemisphere, leaving the market open for international or transnational providers. Higher education institutions in North America, Australia and the UK have led the way in meeting this need, through establishing branch campuses or franchising and twinning agreements with local institutions, or via distance education and e-learning, but there is now a proliferation of other borderless providers, including new for-profit private universities, corporate universities, media companies delivering education programmes, professional associations becoming directly active in higher education and companies with high training needs establishing their own training facilities, such as Microsoft.

Daniel (2002) summarises the combination of factors that have helped to produce demand for borderless education. The development of English as a

global language, and the gradual erosion of the powers of nation-states have produced a climate that allows 'borderless education' to flourish. Modern means of transport and communication have increased both the real and virtual mobility of people, capital and knowledge thus helping to promote cultural exchange. Middlehurst (2002) points out that many (though by no means all) borderless developments are commercially driven, both in terms of income generation to providers of education and in terms of the return on investment for purchasers of education. Like Van Damme, he is concerned by the narrow range of subjects and programmes on offer, and calls for some form of curriculum control both at institutional and national level. ENQA (the European Network of Quality Agencies) has published an analysis of the quality assurance implications of new structures of higher education, pointing out that new forms of provider and provision, new modes of delivery and new types of knowledge require fundamental changes in quality assurance arrangements and new kinds of consumer protection against the claims of non-authorised or disreputable providers. (Middlehurst, 2001).

Mason (1998:ix) looks at the increasing differentiation of the education market around the world, and stresses the need for a radical rethink of the organisational, pedagogical and technological delivery of higher education. From an examination of five case studies of institutions offering higher education and training globally, she identifies the following factors which make these institutions successful: they all offer courses in the English language, they offer diversity of opportunity for individual learners, from the large-scale global offerings of IBM to the hand-tooled courses meeting specific needs of small numbers of students at Duke University, North Carolina. They have all adopted well-developed pedagogical processes with in-built student support, and they offer a curriculum which reflects the needs of lifelong learners by concentrating on professional updating courses in IT, business management and to a smaller extent, languages and cultural subjects.

The Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences (CEURC) (CEURC, 2001) commissioned a study into transnational education across Europe with the support of the EC. The report and recommendations provide some interesting data. In 75% of the countries surveyed, the main types of transnational education identified were delivered by franchise, branch campus and distance learning modes and were largely confined to business subjects, especially MBAs, information technology, computer science and the teaching of widely spoken languages such as English, Spanish and German. The demand for transnational education by foreign nationals is much higher in some countries than in others. It can provide an alternative source of higher education for students living in countries where the national system does not offer a specific programme; where the national system is an elite system and therefore provision of higher education does not meet demand; where the national system does not offer part-time or flexible learning opportunities for students in work; or where the national system does not provide higher education in minority languages or where it is simply too expensive. In Southern Europe it is seen as a significant access route to higher education and the acquisition of internationally recognised qualifications.

So what are the consequences of this growth in borderless education and is it necessarily a good thing? If we look initially at the impact of transnational education on higher education in the EU, we can see that its impact varies according to geographical area, academic sector and type of education system. The survey commissioned by the CEURC (CEURC, 2001) saw the positive aspects of transnational education as providing more choice for potential students, challenging traditional education systems by introducing more competition and innovative programmes and delivery modes, and helping European education to become more competitive. Its impact has been felt most keenly in countries with highly protected state education sectors that do not meet current student demand e.g. Greece (1:13), whereas countries with more open, diverse and flexible education provision like Sweden and the UK report less demand. Transnational education has made less impact on the 18-

24 year old market, presumably because this is already well provided for by public education, which suggests that transnational education does not replace traditional education, but merely complements it. As mentioned above, much of transnational educational provision is confined to business subjects and languages, and much of it is directed at second cycle level or the continuing professional development market.

Mason (1998) also highlights the innovatory nature of 'borderless education' and welcomes the amount of attention that the more reputable providers have paid to the learning process, the role of the teacher, the skills needed by students, and the support systems required. She feels that many higher education institutions have been forced to become more reflexive and revisit their traditional methods of teaching and learning as a result of increased competition by new providers. One example of the care which is being taken to consider the needs of international students is a research project carried out by the Open University into student performance on an internationally marketed online MA programme (Goodfellow et al, 2001). The study investigated some of the ways that cultural and linguistic differences manifest themselves in global on-line learning environments. The results showed that students identified as being non-native speakers of English and with previous educational experiences in countries with different pedagogical traditions from that of the UK, gained consistently lower assessment scores than English native speakers with some familiarity with the UK academic system. The activities that caused most problems for non-native speakers of English were contributing to online discussions with other students, academic writing and keeping to prescribed word limits. Lockwood (2001) draws together accounts from innovators in the field of open and distance learning from around the world and catalogues both their successes and failures, acknowledging that *"we are in the midst of a teaching and technological revolution"* which will have far-reaching implications for approaches to teaching and learning. Field (1995) argues that transnational education represents both an outcome of and a primary factor in the intensification of global interconnectedness and points

Out that whereas education used to be thought of as a tool for nation building, it is increasingly being seen as a commodity to be shaped by consumer demand. Like Field, Edwards (1995) sees the trend towards the student-as-consumer as having positive educational outcomes, forcing teachers and course teams to consider the requirements of learners. He sees the use of telecommunications as empowering the learner and forcing educators, just like businesses, to become more flexible in terms of the timetabling and organisation of their courses in order to offer opportunities for credit accumulation, modularisation and portability.

The issue of improved access to education is often cited as one of the advantages of 'borderless education.' For students who are geographically remote, who are constrained by work or family commitments, who are housebound or disabled, or who simply cannot find the course they want locally, borderless education is seen as providing the answer to their needs. The Open University, in its international strategy review (OU, 1995) justifies the extension of its activities across the globe:

"The University is committed to addressing educational disadvantage and widening educational opportunities for an increasingly large and diverse number of learners. In the past, limitations of educational technology and funding have confined that ability to deliver to fairly strict geographic limits. Those constraints are rapidly diminishing and the OU has the potential to extend educational opportunities to a much wider body of learners not only in the UK but throughout Europe and more widely in the world. In doing so, it has the ability more fully to satisfy its mission. It has the power to transform people's lives without regard to geographic frontiers." (OU, 1995)

The missionary zeal portrayed in this statement needs to be tempered by consideration of some of the arguments against global education. One of the

Key cultural arguments against the spread of global education is the imposition of Western values and curriculum and the loss of indigenous cultures. One of the dangers, according to Mason (1998:10) is that:

"global educators are seen as the new colonisers, insensitively spreading their own views of the world on to developing nations in the mistaken belief that they are actually helping people."

In a similar vein, Usher & Edwards (2000:69) ask the question:

"Does the spread of Western curricula and pedagogy around the globe...constitute a form of new and more subtle cultural colonisation which replaces the more complete forms of economic and political colonisation from which so many parts of the globe have so recently emerged?"

Thorpe & Grugeon (1994:15) state categorically that:

"Universities should not be involved in cultural imperialism. Knowledge should not be monopolised by one country or one institution. The search for global solutions requires universities to cooperate and to share information."

This viewpoint seems optimistic given the current climate of reduced public funding for higher education and the increasing marketisation of education brought about by the inclusion of education into the General Agreement on Trade in Services (WTO, 2000). Evans (1995) points out the danger of large global institutions crushing local educational initiatives that may be better suited to local conditions. The counter-argument to the charge of Western cultural imperialism is the possibility that some students, particularly from the developing world, may actually want to learn about Western theories and concepts, particularly in the fields of business or educational management, as they identify Western culture as the culture of economic success.

On a political front, the biggest drawback to 'borderless education' is that it can be seen as a threat to those nation-states anxious to uphold their power over the education system within their borders. The survey carried out on behalf of the CEURC (CEURC, 2001:42), found that the most successful approaches to transnational education appear to be where it is drawn into the national system of regulation and is not regarded as a threat but an opportunity. However, its rapid expansion raises concerns over quality control and consumer protection against bogus institutions. There are often power and commercial interests involved, and the question of ownership of curriculum is open to debate. The survey calls for greater public accountability and some form of international regulatory system. Daniel (2001) sets out the debate about regulation by pointing out that quality assurance systems in higher education are a relatively new phenomenon in several countries and are in a state of flux in many more. He gives two conflicting viewpoints: on the one hand major public institutions like universities should have some accountability to the governments that the people elect, but on the other hand the pursuit of objective truth and free exchange of knowledge and ideas are best conducted in institutions that are at arm's length from government.

Lastly, there is a social argument against 'borderless education', which contends that it breaks down communities by encouraging individualised learning. In the past, most adult, continuing or lifelong learning was delivered in the classroom, village hall or work setting, (apart from a small minority of students taking correspondence courses), and was seen as a positive benefit to the local community. Borderless and in particular distance education offers the possibility of virtual communities but contact between tutors and students is on a different level and the physical sense of place is lost, to be replaced by electronic and often more fleeting contact of a more superficial nature. Birkerts (1994:27) refers to this as "*an estrangement from geographic place and community*" and fears for "*a resulting absence of any strong vision of a personal or collective future*".

Many of the arguments against the spread of 'borderless education' are equally applicable to the subject of the next section of this literature review: the development of English as a global language.

English as a global language

The reasons behind the rise of English as a global language are many and varied. Firstly, it is important to clarify what the term "global language" signifies. It is not just the case that English is spoken by more people in the world than any other language, but it is more to do with who those speakers are and their reasons for choosing to speak English. According to Crystal (2003a) English happened to be in the right place at the right time. He traces the increased usage of the language back to the beginning of the 19th century when Britain was the leading industrial and trading country in the world. By the end of the century America had become the largest country in the world with the fastest-growing economy and during the 20th century America's supremacy in economic terms helped to establish English as the language spoken by industrialists, economists, politicians and bankers, not to mention the media. Crystal believes that a language has no individual existence but comes to life when it is spoken by people in power for the purpose of empowerment.

Coulby (2000) emphasises the perception of language as a means of acquiring political power and economic success, when talking about the rising popularity of English among the former Eastern bloc countries:

"When English replaced Russian on the curriculum of Estonian and Latvian speaking schools, this was much more consciously a rejection of (not least linguistic) imperialism. English as the language of capitalism, as well as democracy and of international culture in contrast to Russifying insularity, was eagerly embraced".
(Coulby, 2000:112)

Graddol (2001) believes that economic and demographic factors have had more influence than military power over the spread of English across the world. He uses the “engco” model to illustrate his argument. This is an index that calculates the global influence of language according to various economic factors such as openness to world trade and demographic factors such as numbers of young speakers and rates of urbanisation. This index currently shows English to be a long way ahead of all other languages, including Chinese. The need for a global language, a language that could be used to communicate across territorial borders and economic sectors, was most strongly felt in the aftermath of two world wars when several multinational organisations were set up such as the World Health Organisation, UNESCO, and the UN. Suddenly, large numbers of people were required to talk to each other and the limitations of translators and interpreters began to be felt. The need for a common language in which to express opinions and concerns became paramount. Since the 1960s English has once again proved to be in the right place at the right time as the economic leadership of America led to developments in information and communications technology. English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language - in over 100 countries, including China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt and Brazil - and in most of these countries it is emerging as the chief foreign language to be encountered in schools. Further statistics on the usage of English around the globe can be found in Crystal (2002, 2003b) and Graddol (1997).

What are the longer-term implications of the emergence of English as a global language? Does this mean that inevitably other languages will die? The answer would appear to be that, as with other manifestations of globalisation, there are both universalising and particularising tendencies at work. While over a quarter of the world’s population now speaks English, language is still seen to be one of the major elements in the formation of an individual’s sense of identity and there are many signs of a revival in ethnic and minority languages around the world. Crystal (2003a:22) argues that *“a world of linguistic diversity can in principle continue to exist in a world united by a common*

language". Graddol (2001) sees English as having two main functions: as a vehicular language for international communication and as a basis for constructing cultural identities. This dual functionality is of particular relevance to the Anglophile community of OU students in CE (Tait, 1996) and is an issue that is addressed in the research questions for this study (1:17). Although most of the world's business is currently conducted in English, paradoxically this could mean that Britain's monolingualism may become a liability. Graddol foresees a greater volume of trade within Europe where bi or trilingual competence will be necessary, and as a result Britain's inability to provide staff competent in two or three languages may prove to be a hindrance in an increasingly competitive world. Rather than one single language replacing English as a global lingua franca, he thinks a small number of world languages may form an "oligopoly", each with particular spheres of influence and regional bases (Graddol, 2001:29).

As with borderless education, the main dangers or threats of the existence of a global language are seen as being the imposition of language imperialism and the possible erosion of minority languages. Could it be the case that someone with English as a mother tongue is somehow automatically conferred with more power than someone who has had to learn it as a foreign or second language? Could senior managers in an international organisation who do not have English as a mother tongue find themselves at a disadvantage in comparison with their mother tongue colleagues? In academic circles, could it be that someone who writes up research in a language other than English finds their research overlooked by international colleagues? All these scenarios are quite plausible examples of language imperialism at work. Crystal (2003a) believes that one way to overcome threats of language imperialism and the erosion of minority languages is to promote bilingualism or even plurilingualism at a very early age when children are most receptive to learning languages. Plurilingualism allows people to use English as a means of communicating with the wider world, while using their mother tongue or other languages to participate in their local community. However,

the need for political leaders and businessmen in developing countries to have a good command of the English language highlights the growing inequalities surrounding those who have access to the language and those who do not.

In the past 30 years English has increasingly assumed the role of the normal medium for instruction in higher education in many countries, especially at advanced levels. Eighty-five per cent of research papers in biology and physics are now written in English, (Crystal, 2003a). This situation has arisen partially as a result of the increased numbers of foreign students in English-speaking universities which has meant that English became the lingua franca for pragmatic reasons, but also more recently because English is also the language of new technology. At present 90% of Internet hosts are based in English-speaking countries and therefore the majority of traffic and websites are based in English. English is said to have accounted for 80% of all computer-based communication in the 1990s (Murray, 2001).

Having explored the issues of globalisation and its relationship to higher education, the development of borderless education, and the spread of the English language across the globe, I finally turn my attention to the subject at the centre of my virtual diagram of concentric circles (Chapter 3:34), which is the individual student.

The student in the borderless environment

From my reading of the literature on transnational education, I am beginning to form a picture of the sort of student who is attracted to this form of education. They are more likely than not to be aged over 25 and because of work or domestic commitments are looking for part-time or distance learning provision (Mason, 1998). They are often returning to education in order to acquire further specialist knowledge that is often work-related (Jarvis, 2001), or they may be responding to a lack of appropriate higher education opportunities within their own country (CEURC, 2001). A proportion may

fall into the category of “knowledge workers” (Castells, 1996) and they are likely to be proficient in two or more languages including English. However, in order to build up a fuller picture of our student, and to gain an understanding of what it feels like to be a student in a borderless environment, I now turn to the literature on identity, with a view to exploring the extent to which education, as well as language, can impact upon a sense of national or cultural identity. The literature reviewed in this final section will help to address my fourth research question: *“To what extent are concepts of cultural and national identity relevant to graduates who have studied in a transnational context?”*(1:18)

Theories of identity

The concept of identity has attracted much attention from social scientists and other academic disciplines in recent years, particularly as a consequence of the increasing inter-connectedness of cultures and nationalities brought about by globalisation. Giddens (1991) makes the distinction between traditional and modern societies, whereby traditional societies honoured the past and perpetuated the experience of previous generations whereas modern societies are societies of constant, rapid and permanent change and therefore old identities which stabilised the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new and changing identities. Hall et al (1992) outlines three concepts of identity: the enlightenment model, the sociological model and the postmodern model. He describes how the enlightenment model (arising from the enlightenment movement in the late 17th and 18th centuries) of the individual as a self-sufficient unified individual gave way, in the early 20th century, to the sociological model which reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that the individual is not autonomous but is formed in relation to other people around them who give value and meaning to the world they inhabit. In the post-modern era, the concept of identity is no longer fixed but is formed and transformed according to the cultural systems that surround us. Giddens (1991) and Beck et al (1992) see identity as a reflexive rewriting of the self, brought about by the continuous

self-monitoring processes of modernity. Identity is always relational and increasingly fragmented. Lyotard (1979:15) sums this up well: *"No self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations"*. Globalisation and the increasing mobility of people and ideas have disturbed the relatively settled character of many populations and cultures, and as a result identities are now more about our possible futures, how we can or wish to be represented rather than about our present or past states.

Castells (1998) explores the reasons for the changes in the ways people build their identities. Traditionally ethnicity and nationality have played a major part in the construction of identity but now that the concept of a nation state is giving way to what he calls "the network society", identities can be altered according to time, place and circumstances, regardless of geographical or political boundaries. Hawisher and Selfe (2000) refer to these shifting identities as "blurred" or "transformative". Grant (1997) discusses the idea of "markers" of identity, a concept first introduced by Smolicz (1991, cited by Grant 1997:14), but unlike Castells, he believes that the principal markers nowadays remain those of nationality and citizenship. Other markers such as religion, political ideology, class and language can exist coterminously with nationality, and may even take precedence in certain circumstances. Grant gives the example of Northern Ireland, where the principal marker is seen to be religion with the conflict between Protestants and Catholics.

National identities

In the postmodern world an individual may assume different identities at different times and in different places, and as a result can become isolated or dislocated from society. The idea of dislocation raises the question of how this can affect a sense of national identity. Gellner (1983) believes that without a sense of national identity the individual would experience a deep sense of loss:

"The idea of a man (sic) without a nation seems to impose a strain

on the modern imagination. A man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears. All this seems obvious, though, alas, it is not true. But that it should have come to seem so very obviously true is indeed an aspect, perhaps the very core, of the problem of nationalism. Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has now come to appear as such".
(Gellner 1983:6)

His argument is that national identities are not something we are born with, but are formed and transformed according to our understanding of what it is to be, for example, "English" or "Spanish". In other words, a nation is not just a political entity but also a system of cultural representation, which is built up through a shared history, tradition, language and folklore. However, Hall (1992) argues that we should not view national cultures as unified identities as all nations are made up of different social classes, gender, ethnic groups, and religions and all Western nations are in fact "cultural hybrids". With the onset of globalisation and the scope and pace of global integration, Hall identifies three contrasting outcomes. Firstly, some national identities are being eroded as new linkages between nations are formed in a process which Hall calls 'cultural homogenisation'. Secondly, others are being strengthened by the resistance to globalisation which, in some cases has taken the form of a renewal of ethnic, religious or political minority identities including the phenomenon of 'fundamentalism'. Thirdly, new identities of hybridity are being formed, for example the "black" community in Britain, a term used to describe both Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities who are seen as the same i.e. "non-white" by the dominant culture. Featherstone (1990) sees a similar process of cultural integration and disintegration taking place on not only an inter-state level but also on a transnational or trans-societal level. He argues that postmodernism is both a symptom and a powerful

cultural image of the swing away from the concept of global culture, in terms of diversity, variety and richness of popular and local discourses *"Postmodernism celebrates the previously unspoken multiplicity of differences of today in sexuality, gender, ethnicity, art and writing"*. (Featherstone, 1990:149)

National identity should not be confused with national characteristics, a somewhat contentious term given the nature of the multicultural world in which we live. The idea of a national characteristic or stereotype rests on the assumption that there is something intrinsic about being Belgian, French or Spanish which is not only common to all members of that community but is also permanent in time. However, as evidenced by the literature on identity, identities are constructed by individuals, and can develop, change and even disappear as a reaction to the circumstances in which individuals find themselves. Peabody (1985) and Hofstede (1994) defend the use of national characteristics for specific social and cultural purposes. Peabody gives examples of surveys into differences in socio-economic roles between northerners and southerners, which may be explained to some extent by religious demarcations between Protestant and Catholic countries. Hofstede (1994:260) describes culture as *"the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another"*. He identifies five values or issues that he uses to distinguish social and cultural identities within multinational organisations in 40 different countries: power distance (unequal versus equal); uncertainty avoidance (rigid versus flexible); individualism versus collectivism; masculinity versus femininity; and long versus short-term orientation. When applied to Belgium, Greece and Spain, Spain as a representative of a Catholic and Latin country would, according to Hofstede, score more highly than Greece on the power distance index due to the religious inheritance of Catholicism with the supreme power of the Pope. Uncertainty avoidance, as manifested in a society with a strong rule orientation means that, for example, Greece would score more highly in this category than Spain. However tempting it may be to categorise countries

according to value or behaviour-led indices, this form of comparison takes no account of the multiplicity of cultural differences to be found within them. Schwarz (1998) asserts that national identity is not something we are born with but is formed and transformed in relation to representation. We only know what it is to be English because of how “Englishness” is represented in the media, in education, in history, literature and folklore. The same forces that are reshaping national identities are also shaping nation-states and education systems; on the one hand they are being eroded by a growth in cultural homogenisation, and on the other they are being strengthened by a resistance to globalisation. New identities of hybridity are taking their place, and the graduates in this research, having studied in a cross-cultural context, are in a good position to comment on the extent to which their sense of nationality has been affected by their experiences of a different educational environment. As residents of Belgium, Greece and Spain, these graduates also belong to the wider entity of the European continent, and therefore it is important to look at the implications of national identity in this wider context.

European cultural identity

The application of Hall’s theory of cultural hybridity is particularly apposite when studying aspects of European society. Williams (2000:61) describes European culture as “a culture of diversity”. Chimisso (2003:2) gives a definition of culture as:

“the totality of symbols and artefacts produced by human beings...encompassing modes of thinking, feeling and behaving as much as values, customs, traditions and norms.”

and identifies four elements that are particularly relevant to the construction of cultural identities in Europe: history, geography, religion and language. A sense of a shared past, a shared territory, a shared religion and an official national language have all been used as markers for cultural identity in Europe, despite the fact that some of these markers are open to interpretation.

For example, the notion of Europe as a Christian continent has always been a powerful concept despite the fact that nowadays 40 million Europeans profess to other religions, notably Islam. The issue of an official national language is a complex one, especially in countries such as Switzerland and Belgium where there is more than one. Even the idea of a shared territory is contentious as debates continue over the Eastern borders of Europe. Education is also a powerful tool for promoting a sense of national identity, as we have seen earlier in this thesis (1:7). The study by school children of the literature, language, history and geography of their country is seen as the major way of constructing a feeling of citizenship in the young population.

Is there such a thing as a European identity? Chimisso (2003) believes that the term "European" can have a variety of meanings and connotations for different people. For British people the terms British and European could be seen as being in conflict whereas for an Italian they are compatible. Perceptions of Europe and its parts vary greatly between one country and another, and may depend on age, class, personal experiences and outlook. Like any other identity, European identity has limits and can be constructed against the "other", that which is not European. It is only one possible identity among many. Emsley (2003) believes that Europe is not a nation, nor is it an entity with which people in the mass have identified when forming a sense of themselves. He points out that very few people have fought and died for Europe as they have for a religious faith, for a sovereign, for a national cause or even for the international proletarian revolution. It has no symbols and no cultural artefacts and ideologies in any way comparable with those of nationality and nationalism. It remains the case, however, that the European cultural elite has commonly had a view of "Europe" as different from the rest of the world, and since the Enlightenment at least, has regarded Europe as the more civilized part of the world.

Pedagogy and identity

Having discussed the changing nature of identity and the concept of national identity, I complete this section of the literature review with a look at how pedagogy can influence identity. Edwards & Usher (2000:59) believe that the introduction of the use of information and communication technologies has accelerated the trend towards individualisation and changed the nature of learner identity. Once learning becomes separated from the classroom and can be accessed at home, at the workplace, in a library or in a multitude of other environments, the status of the learner as student becomes dispersed. Students are no longer identified by the institution they attend, nor the subject or level of their studies. Instead of being passive recipients of learning, individuals can now manage their own learning and require new skills of knowledge management in order to differentiate, analyse and evaluate a range of different sources of knowledge. The Internet opens new vistas to learners that transcend traditional cultural borders. Lifelong learning, and in particular distance learning, can be said to transform the possibilities of what it means to be a student. They can also transform the identity of the teacher. Cunningham et al (1997) explain how the introduction of information and communications technologies has changed the role of teacher. No longer the fount of all knowledge, the teacher becomes the facilitator of knowledge, helping learners to access and use information. The notion of a canon of knowledge that has to be imparted to students is being undermined by flexible delivery methods, the packaging of learning opportunities and the greater accessibility of information. The distance between student and teacher becomes smaller, as they both learn to interpret and translate knowledge together. Chappell et al (2003: 1-2) set out the case for the relationship between education and identity, claiming that changing learner identities is an integral part of many forms of educational practice today, and that the current resurgence in lifelong learning can be seen as a response to the features of contemporary life in which continuous change is a key feature. The need to negotiate one's life more reflexively in order to cope with uncertainty, the erosion of traditional life trajectories and the pluralisation of individual and collective identities are all related to structural changes in

society resulting from globalising processes and the application of new information technologies.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have set out the theoretical background to my research, as represented by a series of concentric circles with the central focus on the OU graduate who has studied in a transnational context. Set within the wider context of the development of the European Higher Education Area, the debate over the declining power of the nation-state, the internationalisation of higher education, the growth of cross-border education and the increase in the use of English as the global language of academia, it is possible to identify how the essential contradictions or “paradoxical consequences” (Featherstone, 1993) of globalisation link these layers of context together. The tension between homogeneity and diversity, the global and the local, universalism and particularism can be found in debates over ownership of education as well as over issues of language and curriculum. Evidence of the increasing polarisation of society can be found not only in the labour market but also in the cultural, linguistic and educational fields. At one extreme we can see the spread of Western cultural and linguistic imperialism as evidenced in the growth of borderless education delivered in the English language. At the other end of the spectrum, the rise of ethnic revivalism and the use of minority languages indicate an instinct for the preservation of the local and the native. Even on a personal level, our sense of self and our understanding of where and how we fit into the social world is becoming increasingly fragmented as new identities are formed and reformed as a reaction against the ever-changing facets of a postmodernist society.

I have endeavoured to reflect these themes or tensions in the design and content of my research questions (1:17). The themes of nationality, language and borderless education are clearly evident, and the formatting of the questions has been designed to procure different types of information, including quantifiable data about the participants in terms of nationality, country of birth, educational background and employment status, but also

qualitative data about their experiences and perceptions of being a learner in a transnational context.

In Chapter Four I examine the implications of this theoretical setting on my choice of research methods.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter sets out to explain and defend my choice of research methodology. Given the breadth of the context as highlighted in Chapters One and Two, the cross-cultural nature of the case studies involving three different countries, and the complexity of the theoretical backdrop as evidenced in Chapter Three, I decided to employ a multiple research strategy including both quantitative and qualitative research methods. When revisiting the research questions (1:17) it became apparent that I would need to use different methods to elicit different types of information. Before explaining the rationale behind my choice of research tools, I explore the different research approaches I considered before finally adopting that of a reflective practitioner within a cross-cultural and interpretative paradigm. I then proceed to look at the implications of combining quantitative and qualitative methods on the type and nature of the research that I have carried out, and follow this up by a consideration of the issues of sampling, ethics, confidentiality, evaluation and the role of the researcher.

The basis of my research was an investigation into reflections on what it means to be a learner in a transnational context. In the process of this investigation it was hoped that both the participants and the researcher would be able to find interpretations to attach to these reflections. The aim was to construct a reality from a number of different sources. The nature of this reality would differ depending upon social, political, cultural, or ethnic factors and indeed it was to be expected that multiple “constructions” would emerge and co-exist given the cross cultural context of this research.

Alternative research approaches

When trying to find an appropriate methodological framework within which to conduct this research I looked initially at biographical and then at comparative or international approaches. I was attracted to the first method, as I wanted to put the participants’ voice to the fore, and felt that any study

that employed a reflexive approach ought to have the subject at the centre. Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990) argue that modern society is giving a new importance to individuals and that there is more opportunity for individuals to choose their own identities. Rustin (2000) makes the link between the phenomenon of "individualization" and the recent interest among social scientists in biographical research methods. Although I could see how this particular piece of research could fall into this category, and felt that taking a narrative approach would work well, I was anxious about two aspects: the time span over which the interviews would have to be carried out, and the process involved in transferring the particular to the general. As I understand it, the biographical method would involve carrying out a number of in-depth interviews with participants, possibly several times over a long period of time, and then using discursive, participatory or interpretive methods to pick out the themes and common threads with which to construct new meanings and a new reality (Alheit et al 1995). I felt restricted by the predetermined timescale of the Doctorate Programme, and was also concerned about the process of transferability. How would I be able to convince my audience that, for example, 15-20 interviews were in any way representative of a new breed of graduates who had studied in a borderless environment? I was also influenced by a comment from Chamberlayne (2000) who remarks that biographical methods are particularly useful for giving a voice to those sections of society whose experience could not be directly tapped through documentary or formal survey sources. I interpreted this to mean those members of society who are in the main unrepresented and unheard, and I did not feel that this description fitted these particular participants, all of whom by the nature of the research, are well-educated and highly articulate.

The second possibility was to adopt a comparative or international approach. According to Crossley & Watson (2003:19), the field of comparative and international education is *"complex and multifaceted... both difficult to define and challenging to engage with"*. Traditionally, one of the reasons behind comparative and international education was to gain a better understanding

of one's own or of other countries' education systems, in order to identify similarities and differences and to promote improved international understanding. However, the recent intensification of globalisation, the increased role played by international agencies in shaping educational debates and the impact of new technologies on the delivery and content of education, has seen resurgence in the interest in this type of research. There is now a need for more cross-cultural dialogue and for differing worldviews to be heard. I felt, however, that the transnational perspective of my research did not fit particularly well into the comparative approach. I am not making a comparison between the British higher education system and that of other countries, although there is an element of that in the data that arises from the interviews. I do include some comparative reflections about the different educational and cultural contexts in which the graduates are living (in Belgium, Greece and Spain), but the focus of my research is the impact of British higher education, delivered by distance learning, on students who are living in another country and in another cultural setting. In one sense it involves a cross-cultural dialogue in that the participants are multicultural, but the core of the research is an exploration of how education that has been delivered in a borderless context can affect the experience of the learner. A comparative approach would have been more applicable had I been focusing purely on the differences between teaching and learning styles in universities across Europe.

Reflective practitioner approach

The approach that I finally adopted was that of the "reflective practitioner" (Schon, 1983). Reflexivity is a process in which the researcher is continuously reflecting upon themselves, sharing with the reader and with the research participants the effect that the latter's stories and the research process were having upon them. Hertz (1997:35-37) says that *"to be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while living in the moment"*, and considers that it is important for the researcher to locate themselves within *"power hierarchies and within a constellation of gender, race, class and citizenship"*, and to

acknowledge how their own positions and interests are imposed at all stages of the research process. The phrase “situated actors” is used to describe what the researcher brings to the process of creating meaning. According to Hertz it is rare for an author to reveal to their audience how their life may have paralleled that of their respondents even though, in order to make sense of what others are telling them, they need to draw on their own history. Her argument is that by including the researcher's own voice the audience is more able to situate the researcher and so is more able to understand their perspective or why they have included some voices over others.

The researcher's voice

Following on from the brief description of my background and interest in the subject of transnational learning (Chapter 1:4), I recognise that it is important to confront the issue of my own values and beliefs and to acknowledge the fact that I am not, as Bruner (1993:1) states, *“an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer, standing outside and above the text”* but am *“historically positioned and locally situated as an all-too-human observer of the human condition”*. Although I aimed to give an objective interpretation of the data that I gathered, and by using a multiple research strategy hoped to construct a multi-dimensional picture, I must acknowledge the position that I am in, and my relationship to the participants in the research. This relationship, however, may be a cause for some confusion, as I am an employee of the Open University but am undertaking this research of my own volition as a student of the OU. The ethical questions posed by this situation are discussed in more detail below, but the significance of this dual role needs to be noted and addressed at appropriate points during the analysis and evaluation of the research.

Cross-cultural research

The requirement for the researcher's voice to be heard throughout the research is also a crucial factor when carrying out cross-cultural research. Sparks (2002) believes that cross-cultural research in adult education is

inherently problematic because of the diversity of populations engaged in learning and the potential for differences in ethnicity, class, gender and race between the researcher and the participants. He believes that a methodology built upon *"an epistemology of cross-cultural beliefs"* challenges the researcher to become self-conscious and requires an explicit acknowledgment of their own theoretical, personal and professional biases. These concerns can present further challenges to think about identity and subjectivity, but also legitimates multiple tellings, experiences and realities. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) believe that cultural synergy is developed by the systematic interaction of people from different cultures, and that it is through the mutual effort of teachers and students to understand each other's academic cultures and cultures of learning that cultural understanding and harmony will emerge:

"It is through becoming aware of one's own cultural presuppositions and those of others that I can seek to build a bridge of mutual intercultural learning". (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998)

A multiple research strategy

My research involved the use of three different research tools: a focus group, a postal questionnaire and telephone interviews. This meant that I was employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, or what Brannen (1992:124) refers to as "multiple research strategies". My justification for the complexity of this approach is that I was wanting to acquire slightly different data from each method. The focus group would take the form of a preparatory investigation of the topic by an "expert panel" (Bloor et al 2001), in order to clarify the questions which needed to be asked. The questionnaire, which was sent to the complete cohort of graduates from each of the three specified countries, would provide me with a broad quantifiable framework based on a relatively large-scale sample of graduates, against which I could contextualise the data that I obtained from the subsequent interviews. In the belief that life is multi-faceted and that there is no single way of seeing reality, I would argue that conceptions of reality can be constructed in different ways

and by using different tools. Gorard (2002:345-346) believes that the “compleat” researcher should be prepared to find, use and critique all evidence relevant to their quest, regardless of its form, and should be guided by the principle of *“fitness for purpose”* when choosing their research methods, rather than *“wasting time and energy in pointless debates about the virtues of quantitative versus qualitative approaches”*. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data in this research is helpful in giving the reader a sense of the wider scale of the subject without losing the intensity that is gained from purely qualitative research.

Brannen (1992) draws attention to the implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in terms of paradigms. The qualitative researcher, using a wide lens, starts by defining general concepts that, as the research progresses, change their definition. They may have ideas about what they might find, but are not necessarily ideas to which they are heavily committed:

“Even if researchers lack a clear set of hypotheses at the start of their research, their ideas cannot help but be influenced by their prior knowledge of the literature and by their repertoires of lay knowledge”. (Brannen, 1992:8)

The quantitative researcher, on the other hand, looking at the world through a narrow lens, isolates and defines variables to frame hypotheses often before data is collected, which are then tested upon the data. The logic of the quantitative enquiry is to do with generalisability and how far the findings can be generalised to a larger or parent population, whereas qualitative research is more concerned with the replication of the findings in other similar sets of conditions. When relating Brannen’s theories to my own research, I can understand more clearly why I needed the complementarity which using both approaches would bring. I started this research without a clear set of hypotheses but with considerable prior knowledge of the issues through my work experience. I wanted to obtain some quantifiable data

about the nature of the phenomena, in other words biographical information that would tell me certain things about these particular OU graduates, but I also wanted to gather qualitative data about their experiences, feelings and attitudes. The qualitative data was used to interpret, to clarify and to personalise the data that had been collected in the survey. Wengraf (2001:2-3) recognizes the problem faced by researchers using multiple research strategies, and states that it is perfectly possible for a researcher to use a “hypothetico-inductivist” model i.e. collecting the facts first and then deriving the theory, at some points in their research cycle, and a “hypothetico-deductivist” model i.e. starting with a theory which is then proven by the collected facts, at others. He finds it helpful to think of these models in terms of position on a spectrum, in which case I would place myself strategically nearer the inductivist end of the spectrum, but at times during this research have used deductivist techniques in order, for example, to make decisions about what questions I wanted to ask and to whom. As will become clearer when I describe my research methods in more detail in the next chapter, my choice of research tools also indicated a deductivist approach, by using a focus group at the beginning of the research exercise in order to clarify the subject areas to be covered in my questionnaire and in subsequent interviews.

Denzin (1970) saw the use of multiple research methods as a means of examining the same research problem in different ways and thereby helping to validate the conclusions that were reached about the data. This claim has been refuted by Fielding & Fielding (1986), Hammersley & Atkinson (1983), and Bryman (1988) who all agree that the assumption that combining approaches ensures validity is naïve, and that validity can best be measured by assessing the plausibility, credibility and relevance of the research findings to its intended audience. The issue of validity is examined in more depth below (4:78)

Research tools

- *The focus group*

I decided to start with a focus group as a way of carrying out an initial exploratory investigation into the issues involved in being a learner in a transnational context. The purpose of the focus group was to be two-fold: to test out the validity of the assumptions or hunches that I was bringing with me into the research, in other words to confirm that the issues which I thought were important to explore were also seen as being relevant by other "situated actors" in the field, and secondly, to help me to identify and modify the questions that I wanted to pose in my questionnaire.

From their introduction as a tool for carrying out commercial market research in the 1940s, the focus group gained in popularity within the public sector during the 1960s and 1970s (Bloor et al 2001). The extended use of these groups to gain access to group meanings and normative understandings proved to be a useful method for sociological research. Vaughn et al (1996) suggests that this is because people are seen by researchers as valuable sources of information, capable of both reporting and interpreting factual data and forming opinions. Structured group discussion such as that found in a well-run focus group can be an efficient and powerful tool for obtaining opinions, perceptions and feelings about a given topic. However, when it comes to documenting behaviour, focus groups are less suitable than other forms of research such as individual interviews. It is when focus groups are used alongside surveys, in-depth interviews and other ethnographic approaches, that their real benefit can be observed. Field (2000:2) sees one of the benefits from running a focus group as *"the interactive nature of the debate within the group which functions as a small-scale learning community in its own right"*, and advocates their use as a research tool *"which is particularly apposite in investigating lifelong learning."* Morgan (1996:131-133) points out that a focus group can be used at different points in the research process; at the exploratory stage of a study, for the collection of the main data or in the

closing stages of a study in order to interpret findings or generate further perspectives for research. Chioncel et al (2003) set out to test the validity and reliability of focus groups within the field of adult education by using three different theoretical perspectives: a radical hermeneutic position, a moderate interpretative position and a more realistic position, which bridged the gap between qualitative and quantitative research. They applied these perspectives on four recent European research projects into adult education, all of which made extensive use of the focus group method. Their findings show that focus groups are used for different purposes and to different effects, but their theoretical validity depends entirely upon the quality of the final report and the competence of the researcher to locate the results in the wider context of the research. Practical problems to do with the make-up of the group and the group dynamics were cited as more problematical than technical problems with recording and coding the data.

- Postal questionnaires

My second research tool was the postal questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide me with numerical, personal data about the nationality, language skills, educational background and professional status of the participants. My reasoning here was that if I based my research simply on a small number of interviews, I could be accused of anecdotalism, whereas if I were able to test out the qualitative data collected from interviews against the backdrop of data collected from a larger sample, this would make the research more valid. Gorard (2002:351) refers to this method of combining qualitative and quantitative data as the "*new political arithmetic*" model (NPA). He sees the merit of this two-stage research design as combining quantitative methods to provide largely descriptive phenomena with qualitative methods in order to provide explanatory data. Each type of data has a different purpose for which it may best be suited.

Oppenheim (1992) states that questionnaires are obviously advantageous for reaching respondents at widely dispersed addresses and are a relatively low-

cost method of collecting data, but interviews are better for asking open-ended and probing questions and for preventing misunderstandings. The disadvantages of questionnaires are the possibilities of a low response rate, the lack of opportunity to correct misunderstandings, and their unsuitability for certain categories of society (for example, young children). Sapsford & Jupp (1996) warn about the effects of low response rates and recommend that researchers provide information on the characteristics of those who did not respond so that some assessment can be made of the representativeness of the sample. Moser & Kalton (1971) highlight some of the issues affecting response rates to postal questionnaires and identify sponsorship or ownership of the questionnaire as being one of the factors most likely to influence the response rate. Participants need to know and understand where the questionnaire has come from, why and by whom the survey is being undertaken, and how they have come to be selected for questioning. If the subject of the questionnaire is seen to be of relevance to their lives, or if they feel that by completing the questionnaire they can influence decisions relevant to their lives, they are more likely to take the time to complete it. Youngman (1978) recommends that when designing a questionnaire, the themes should be made explicit at the start, and that simpler, more factual questions should be presented first, followed by more complex or open-ended questions towards the end. Participants should always be thanked for their contribution and given the opportunity to contact the researcher if they have questions or wish to receive a copy of the final report. Sapsford & Jupp (1996) recommend that a draft questionnaire should always be piloted among a small sample which is representative of the target population in order to both gauge the length of time which it takes to complete and to investigate whether the questions are properly understood by the respondents.

- Semi-structured interviews

My third research tool was a small number of semi-structured in-depth telephone interviews with a sample of graduates from each of the three countries that I used in the research. I was very anxious to include the voice of

the participants more directly and decided that interviews would provide me with more subjective data that would flesh out the quantitative data from the questionnaires. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data would be helpful in giving the reader a sense of the wider scale of the subject without losing the intensity that is gained from purely qualitative research.

Interviewing is one of the most popular methods of obtaining information from people, and provides an opportunity for the researcher to interact with the informants and to ask more probing questions than could be tabled in a questionnaire. Various theorists have looked at the practice of research interviewing (Foddy, 1993; Markova, 1990; Briggs, 1986) and have drawn up conceptual frameworks or models: the symbolic interactionist, the three-step interactional and the anthropological-historical. The model which I adopt is that of Wengraf (2001), who describes the biographic, semi-structured interview and sees the purpose behind these interviews as developing or constructing a model of some aspect of reality, or testing a constructed model against "the facts", in other words, both "theory-construction and theory-verification". His pyramid model consists of the research purposes at the top of the pyramid which influence the central research questions on the next layer of the pyramid, which in turn decide the theory questions, which then have to be translated into interview questions (2001:61-63). He makes the point that theory questions should not be asked of the interviewees as they are formulated in the theory-language of the interviewer, whereas interview questions should be formulated in the language of the interviewee.

- Telephone interviewing

Because of the geographical spread of the graduates in my survey, I had to settle for interviewing by telephone rather than by my preferred method, which was face-to-face. Interviewing a stranger without the aid of visual and other non-verbal cues can make it more difficult for the interviewer to create rapport and to develop a sense of mutual trust. Without visual support it may not be so easy to detect when the interviewee has misunderstood the

question, is losing interest or is distracted. On the other hand, the higher degree of anonymity afforded by telephone interviews can lead to more honesty and a lower tendency to give socially desirable answers. Research undertaken in the UK to compare data collected by telephone interviews as opposed to face-to-face interviews (Sykes & Collins, 1988; McQueen 1989) found a remarkable similarity in the answers obtained by the different modes. Telephone surveys are at least as successful as face-to-face interviews in eliciting information on sensitive questions. There is a tendency for answers to open questions to be shorter and the whole interview procedure tends to proceed more briskly than in the case of face-to-face interviews. For non-sensitive factual questions few differences have been reported in the distributions of responses obtained. As regards data quality, initial doubts about the reliability of factual information obtained over the telephone and its comparability with information obtained face-to-face have largely been discounted. In the UK, the Employment Department's Labour Force Survey (McQueen, 1989) satisfied themselves that no identifiable "blips" in the data resulted from adoption of telephone methods as opposed to face-to-face methods. As with face-to-face interviewing, a great deal depends upon the level of interest and involvement aroused by the subject matter.

Sampling

One of the decisions I had to take early in the planning of this piece of research was about the nature and size of the sample. I knew that I wanted to investigate the experiences of Open University graduates who had studied for their degree whilst living in Continental Europe, but the University has been operating throughout the European Union since 1992, and now has an annual production of over 500 graduates per year. Obviously this would be too large a population to study in its entirety. I had to find some criteria with which to limit my selection and I decided firstly to limit the selection on geographical grounds, and secondly by the year of graduation. As I was interested in investigating the cultural diversity which is apparent among OU graduates living in CE, I decided to choose one Northern European country – Belgium,

one Southern European country – Spain, and finally one Eastern European country – Greece. A more detailed rationale for these choices can be found in Chapter 1:8. Patton (1990:169) refers to this form of purposeful sampling as “*maximum variation sampling*”, meaning that the sample has been chosen with the express purpose of demonstrating a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest, but which allows for the identification of important common patterns that cut across variations. My next decision was to look at all graduates living in these three countries who graduated in the year 2000. I was anxious about the possible difficulty of tracing some of these graduates who have previously been identified as being highly mobile (Cathrow, 2000). When I carried out a search of the OU database for the year 2000, it identified a total of 100 graduates in these three countries. I decided, however, to extend my sample to include graduates from the year 2001 as well, as this would give me a more sizeable sample of 323 . In terms of gathering data about personal and professional development, it is also important to allow some period of time between graduation and a follow-up survey. This type of sampling could also be described as “random purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990) in that the whole population of the sample is larger than can be easily managed, therefore a smaller, but still purposeful, sample has been identified.

A third type of sampling, “theoretical sampling”, is advocated by Silverman (2001) as a means of confirming or reaffirming the validity and transferability of a piece of research. This type of sampling refers to the technique of selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions, the theoretical position of the research and the account that is being constructed. Researchers at the start of a project should think about the theoretical context in which it is placed, and samples should be chosen which are appropriate to this context. In my case, I am interested in studying the cultural diversity of the graduate population in CE, and therefore have set out from the start to choose countries which will reflect this diversity in terms of their geographical, political, and cultural backgrounds.

Ethics

One of the first principles of research ethics is that the subjects of the research should not be harmed or in any way damaged by the interview. Sapsford & Jupp (1996:322) look at the range of issues raised by discussions on ethics within social research, and take a "relativist" as opposed to an "absolutist" stance. They argue that there are a large number of ethical imperatives, sometimes in conflict with each other, and that knowing that there can be ethical arguments against a course of action does not absolve the individual from considering the consequences of taking or refraining from the action. Others, taking an "*absolutist*" stance believe that some things are in themselves wrong and should never be done, whatever the consequences. Even basic concepts such as "harm" or "consent" can be problematised.

Issues of confidentiality and anonymity can arise as a result of the close interpersonal interactions required for a reflexive approach. Wengraf (2001:187) gives an explanation of the difference between confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality is the stronger requirement of the two and usually implies that material cannot be used in any form, however anonymised. Anonymity, on the other hand, requires the writer to present material in such a way that the participants would not be recognisable. It is unlikely that a researcher in my position would ever meet the need for confidentiality, but I have had to ensure the anonymity of the participants in my inquiry. The part of my research that was most open to abuse of ethical standards was the telephone interviews. I was asking participants about experiences that they may not have wanted to see published in their names, therefore I had to promise anonymity and ensure that, when writing up the data, individuals could not be identified by their case history. As I was recording these interviews, I made a point of starting each interview by requesting the participant's permission to tape the conversation, by stressing the issue of confidentiality and by explaining how the data would be used and where it would be published.

My "dual" role as employee and student of the Open University could also

raise ethical problems. I was carrying out research into my own institution, but not at the specific behest of that institution. The decision to carry out this research was a personal one, but the subject matter of the research and my working role overlap to a considerable extent. Although the Open University did not commission me to do this research, they have sponsored me in the form of paying my fees, and my intention is that the findings and recommendations will be put into operation within the University in some way. After all, the Doctorate in Education is designed to be a professional qualification that should make *"a significant contribution to the theory and practice of education"*. (OU, 2003:4-5) This duality of purpose means that I ran the danger of being seen by the participants as a representative of the Open University, an "insider", and this could have affected the way in which they related to me and the type of information they were willing to provide. In order to try and circumvent this potential problem I made a formal application to the Open University for permission to carry out research with this particular sample of graduates, I discussed the content and research methods with my immediate line manager, and was careful to be completely open with the participants about the possible conflict posed by my dual role. By adhering to the protocols for practitioner research as drawn up by Kemmis & McTaggart (1981), and by reaching an agreement whereby all partners were clear about their roles in this creation and were willing participants, I felt that the main ethical considerations had been addressed.

Evaluation

The evaluation of interpretive research can be problematic, and requires a different form of evaluation from that of quantitative research. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) argue that the traditional criteria for evaluating qualitative research using positivist terms such as validity, generalisability and reliability are no longer applicable to qualitative studies in the postmodern and poststructuralist age where the author's voice assumes greater importance and meaning is always plural. Some social scientists, (Bruner,1993, Atkinson,1990, Silverman 2001) now believe that there is no such thing as

unadulterated truth and that the researcher is nearly always speaking from a position of privilege and power. All texts are representations of the author, so how does the reader know whether their account of the truth is both faithful to the context and the individuals it is supposed to represent? Denzin and Lincoln (1994:579) highlight the need for a new set of rules and procedures that are agreed within the academic world. Silverman (2001) agrees that the methods for testing validity used in quantitative research are not appropriate for qualitative research, and is equally unhappy with the use of data triangulation and respondent validation as a means of validating field research. Instead he advocates the use of theoretical sampling, analytic induction and constant comparative methods and states that these methods will provide a piece of research that is *"every bit as credible as the best quantitative work"* (Silverman, 2001:254).

My research, however, is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Hammersley et al (1996) argue that the same standard of assessment should be applied across the qualitative-quantitative divide, and that this should be measured in terms of the plausibility and the credibility of the claims made and the evidence produced. The first question that should be asked of any claim is how plausible it is, given the existing knowledge of the reader? Secondly, the reader needs to ask whether it seems likely that the researcher's judgment is accurate, given the nature of the phenomena concerned, the circumstances of the research, and the characteristics of the researcher – in other words how credible is the claim? Thirdly, the reader needs to see the evidence in order to assess plausibility and credibility. The final piece of the jigsaw is the relevance of the research findings to the audience. Hammersley (1992) explains that research is always aimed at a specific audience, and the relevance of the topic must relate to an issue of importance to that intended audience. Of equal importance is that the findings must add something to the body of knowledge that already exists about that topic. It is only when the informed reader has found the research to be plausible, credible, relevant and well evidenced, that they can assess the research for validity.

In conclusion, I would like to turn once more to the original research questions as outlined in Chapter 1:17 and look at these from the perspective of the methodology I have described above. The five questions asked for a diverse range of information: statistical information on the nationality and country of birth of the participants, factual information on the outcomes of studying in terms of career progression, reflections on experiences of studying for a degree, comparative analysis of previous educational experiences and attitudinal responses to feelings about national identity. Clearly a multiple research strategy was needed in order to capture these different kinds of data. The fact that the participants were residents of three different countries provided an additional, comparative layer to the conceptual framework, and meant that I had to take account of cultural and linguistic factors when interpreting the data. However, the richness and diversity of the data has meant that I have been able to tell a multitude of stories that I hope have captured some of the realities of being a learner in a transnational context. The next chapter will look more closely at how this research was actually carried out and will begin to analyse the findings.

Chapter Five: The research process

In this chapter I look more closely at the three different research methods employed in this study, and carry out an initial analysis of the data obtained from each stage of the research. The chapter is divided into three parts. In each part the findings will be linked to the context and the research questions outlined in Chapter One, and to the literature review in Chapter Two. In the conclusion, I highlight any new concepts that emerged from the data and carry these forward into Chapter Six where a final analysis of the combined data will be given.

PART A

The Focus Group

As explained in Chapter Four (4:70), the main reason I decided to start my research with a focus group was to carry out a pilot study into the issues that I felt to be of major relevance to the area of my research by discussing these with a number of colleagues who work as country co-ordinators for the Open University. By running the focus group I wanted confirmation that the issues which I felt were of relevance were also seen to be of prime importance by staff who were closest, in terms of geography and quantity and quality of contact, with the intended participants in my research.

The purpose of my focus group was to:

- gather the views of an “expert panel” of people who are most closely in touch with OU graduates living in CE
- explore a range of issues and opinions from representatives of different European countries
- help to identify possible questions which would be of relevance for the researcher to use when surveying and interviewing OU graduates living abroad
- investigate some of the main cultural differences in respect of approaches to teaching and learning between European countries

The focus group consisted of five OU co-ordinators living in Italy, Greece, Spain, Belgium and Germany. I ran the focus group during the annual conference for OU co-ordinators that takes place each year at the Regional Centre in Newcastle. I invited the co-ordinators from Belgium Greece and Spain and extended the invitation to representatives from other countries in order to widen the scope of the discussions. The session lasted for over an hour and was recorded on audiotape. Despite the fact that the participants were close colleagues, I felt that it was important that the group was run along formal lines, and to explain beforehand the relevance of the discussions for my research. Four key questions were addressed, allowing time for each participant to answer each question:

Q1 *From your experience of talking to OU graduates who have studied for their degree while living outside the UK, what do you think they would say have been:*

a) the advantages

b) the drawbacks

Q2 *What do you see as being the main cultural differences experienced by non-British OU students living outside the UK?*

Q3 *What are the key issues facing OU graduates living in CE?*

Q4 *What do you think would be the most useful questions for the researcher to ask of OU graduates living in your country?*

Outcomes from focus group

The focus group was useful on two accounts. It helped to raise and in some cases confirm my ideas about some of the issues which I would encounter when surveying and interviewing graduates in CE, and also provided positive feedback from colleagues who are closely involved in the field, about the feasibility and indeed the need for this research. They confirmed that there is a gap in our knowledge about both the destinations of OU graduates in CE and their experiences of studying in a transnational context; information which would be useful for advising potential students in the future.

In answer to part (a) of the first question about the advantages of gaining a degree with the OU, there was general agreement that many graduates wanted the opportunity to study in the English language while living abroad. For British expatriates it was seen as a way of keeping in contact with their home country, whilst for nationals of some countries such as Greece and Belgium, the opportunity to study with a British university was seen as giving "kudos" or "status" to their curriculum vitae and would increase their employability. This opinion was contradicted by the co-ordinator from Spain who stated that:

"Having a degree from a British university has no relevance to someone living in Spain and seeking employment within the Spanish state system."

This disagreement highlighted one of the cultural differences to be found within the countries used in my research, and also accords with the problems encountered by non-Spanish OU graduates in gaining state recognition of their qualifications (1:10).

In response to part (b) of the first question there was more divergence of opinion. Although there was general agreement that the length of time required to gain a degree from the Open University was seen as a disadvantage (the same opinion would no doubt be expressed by many students in the UK), the main problem in Greece, which was echoed by the co-ordinators from Spain and Italy, is the lack of recognition of OU degrees by the State in these countries. A discussion followed about the problems arising from the differences in length between UK Bachelors degrees and degrees from European universities, most of which are a minimum of four years in length. This issue is obviously of topical interest, given the stated aims of the Bologna Declaration (1999). The feeling from the Spanish and Italian co-ordinators was that there is a strong protectionist stance being taken in these countries against the possible influx of foreign universities offering alternative

options for higher education. Again, this viewpoint concurs with the findings of the CEURC (CEURC 2001) as reported in 3:45.

Question 2 asked about the cultural differences facing non-British students and produced an interesting list of British educational traditions that can cause problems, including a discussion on what constitutes plagiarism. Explaining to students that they are expected to express the meaning of what they have read in their own words appeared to be a common task among the participants in the group. The difficulty for students for whom English is not their first language, was summed up by the Belgian representative:

"It is easy for us to tell students to express themselves in their own words, but if you have no words the easiest thing to do is to copy from the book." (Belgian co-ordinator)

There was general agreement that the three hour written examination is an almost unknown phenomenon to Continental European students, many of whom are accustomed to oral rather than written exams. The representatives from the Mediterranean countries agreed that there is a reluctance among Southern Europeans to ask for help from their tutor as this is seen as an admission of defeat, but as these students become more comfortable with the Open University's teaching methods they begin to appreciate the support available and consider it to be very good value. There remains some unease, however, about the informal nature of the relationship between OU tutors and students, and Spanish and Italian students were not accustomed, for example, to addressing their tutors by their first name. This was not reported as causing a problem in Belgium or Germany. It is interesting to note here the differences reported in the relationship between students and tutors in Southern as opposed to Northern European countries. It is also important to recognise that the Open University promotes a particular degree of informality and support in the relationship between tutor and student that would not necessarily be found even in traditional UK universities. There was

some discussion about the different attitudes towards assignment cut-off dates and examinations. According to the co-ordinator from Greece, and agreed by those from Italy and Spain:

"Assignment cut-off dates are seen as being open for negotiation and there is an expectation that an exam date can be changed at the request of the student."

However, this was not necessarily the case among students in Belgium.

The answers to Question 3 reiterated the problem of non-recognition of OU degrees by some governments, and opinions were expressed about the low status of distance education within some countries, in particular in Greece. The Greek co-ordinator stated that:

"Out of every ten enquiries that I get about studying with the OU, nine will ask about recognition, of which four will walk away when I tell them about the current situation. This is very frustrating but I feel I must be honest with them."

In contrast, recognition was not seen as being a problem at all in Germany, and only of concern in Belgium for those wishing to seek employment by the Belgian government.

The final question to the focus group asked for suggestions for questions that they would like to see asked of OU graduates. This produced a lengthy list covering many issues, not all immediately relevant to the area of this research. As well as factual data about destination figures, career development opportunities, the advantages of having an international qualification, there were also suggestions for more qualitative and subjective information such as whether the experience of studying in a transnational context has made a difference to a student's values and lifestyle, and whether they feel in any way

dislocated from their community by the experience.

Findings

The findings from the focus group confirmed my expectation that the experiences of OU graduates in different European countries will vary considerably depending upon not only their own nationality and their reasons for living in the country but also the cultural and educational traditions of the country in which they are resident. The focus group highlighted the variation between countries both in terms of the nature of the OU student population and of differing attitudes and support for transnational education. It is clear that the fact that the Open University offers its courses in English is a major attraction, for both expatriates and nationals of Belgium, Greece and Spain. The issue of state recognition of OU degrees is obviously a problem for a lot of graduates, but more so in Greece and Spain than in Belgium. Likewise attitudes towards distance education in particular, and transnational education in general, can differ between countries.

These findings also relate closely to the context of this thesis as described in Chapter Two, and the literature reviewed in Chapter Three, thereby reaffirming the focus for this study. Obviously the Bologna Declaration (1999) is of topical concern and will hopefully help to rectify the current discrepancies between the length and structure of first degrees in different European countries. Difficulties experienced in gaining recognition of OU degrees in some European countries would appear to be caused by the protectionist stance of some governments towards transnational education (3:45). The issue of the power of the nation state in the face of universalising tendencies (Kenway, 1996) is clearly illustrated in the actions of, for example, the Greek government, which refuses to recognise any higher education delivered by distance learning. This bears out the statement by Baumeister (1999: 250) that:

"even where distance education institutions can point to successful histories, it is still difficult to gain acceptance and respect."

The development of English as a global language, the language of business, education and the media (Graddol, 2001), is apparent in the reasons given by non-British nationals for choosing to study for a degree with the OU. Differences in academic traditions found in Northern and Southern European countries, specifically to do with the power relationship between student and tutor, coincide with the theories of Peabody (1995) and Hofstede (1994) and provide an illustration for Hofstede's "power distance index" (1980:260). The request in the final question to look at how distance education can impact upon a student's sense of identity and belonging to a community, ties in with theories about the impact of globalisation on the dislocation (Featherstone, 1990) or fragmentation (Beck, 2000) of identity.

Further questions arising from the focus group

The data from the focus group highlighted four main issues that needed to be explored further. The first issue was that of language. According to the members of the focus group, the fact that the OU's courses are taught in English is a major attraction both to native nationals and British nationals living abroad. This is an important hypothesis that I had to test out on all participants and links in with both the first and second of my original research questions as outlined in (1:17):

The second issue was that of recognition of OU degrees, which was clearly a major concern for OU graduates and has widespread implications for their professional development. As with the issue of language, I felt that this was a topic that needed to be addressed to the full sample of participants and therefore needed to be included in the questionnaire. This linked in with the fifth research question (1:18)

Thirdly, the issue of differing academic traditions highlights the need for an understanding of different cultural traditions in teaching and learning, and ties in with my third research question (1:18) I felt the most appropriate way of exploring this issue was to discuss it in some depth as part of the telephone interviews, rather than including it in the questionnaire, which would allow for only a limited amount of free text.

Finally, the issue of how studying by distance learning in a cross-cultural context can impact upon learner identity called for further investigation into perceptions of national and cultural identity and the relationship between education and identity. Again I felt that this question needed probing in-depth and would be more appropriately addressed in the interview situation, thus linking in with my fourth research question (1:18)

The benefit of the focus group to myself as the researcher, was to focus my attention on some of the key issues that need to be explored in my research, to cement the links between these issues and the research questions that I had identified earlier on in my research, and finally to help design the framework for the postal questionnaire and the subsequent interviews.

PART B

The Postal Questionnaire

My decision to use a questionnaire as my main research tool was based partly upon the type of data that I was hoping to acquire, and partly upon the circumstances of the participants. My preferred method would have been to distribute the questionnaires to the participants in a face-to-face setting so that any misunderstandings could be rectified at the time, but given the wide geographical dispersal of the sample, I had to be content with a postal questionnaire.

Design of questionnaire

Taking into account the advice of Youngman (1978) and Moser & Kalton (2000) as mentioned in Chapter Four, I designed my questionnaire in such a way as to emphasise the different topic areas: nationality, language, educational background, and personal and professional development, and started each section with simple, factual questions before preceding onto multiple choice and open questions. I sent out the questionnaire with a covering letter explaining the purpose behind the research, a stamped addressed envelope to improve the response rate (particularly important given the distances involved), and a brief letter of support from the Regional Director of the Open University in the North which gave the questionnaire a more formal seal of approval. A copy of all these documents can be found in Appendices 1-3

Before mailing out my questionnaire I had to send a draft to the OU Student Research Project Panel, a body that approves all questionnaires that are sent out to students or graduates of the Open University. The purpose behind this panel is to ensure that participants are not overburdened with requests to participate in OU research, that all research is of an appropriate nature and is not likely to cause offence, and to check that all data protection requirements are adhered to (see section on ethics 4:76). I received a brief reply to confirm that the panel had given approval to my questionnaire. There was no comment on the content or design.

The questionnaire was piloted among various colleagues including the country co-ordinators in Belgium, Greece and Spain, and also with a small number of graduates living in these countries but who had graduated more recently than 2001 and therefore would not be part of my final survey. I was able to send out the draft electronically which speeded up the process, and received prompt replies which mainly consisted of suggestions for improving the lay-out and terminology of the questionnaire.

Sample

The final questionnaire was sent to all OU graduates living in Belgium, Greece and Spain who graduated in the years 2000 and 2001, a total of 323. The total number of students living in the whole of CE who graduated in these years was 996. By choosing to focus my research on graduates living in the three specified countries in 2000 and 2001, I sampled 32% of the possible cohort of graduates for the whole of Continental Europe for these years. By graduates I am referring to students who gained Bachelors and Masters degrees, but not students who gained sub-degree qualifications such as undergraduate and advanced diplomas, nor postgraduate certificates and diplomas. The sample did not include graduates who had returned to the UK or moved elsewhere outside CE during or after their studies. This form of “random purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990) seemed to fit the purposes of my research, in that the whole population of the sample was larger than I could easily have managed given the time constraints of the Doctorate Programme, but by using a smaller but still purposeful sample, I was able to carry out some meaningful quantitative research.

For the purposes of this research, the degrees conferred by the Open University on the graduates in this sample have been categorised into three types:

1. Bachelors degrees awarded with and without Honours status (including named and open degrees).
2. Masters degrees (including Masters in Education, Humanities, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Open and Distance Education, Development Management, Science, Psychology, Computing for Commerce and Industry and Manufacturing: Management and Technology).
3. MBAs (Masters of Business Administration).

I made a distinction between Masters degrees and MBAs because of the additional vocational content of the MBA, which I felt might make a

significant difference to both the motivation and the subsequent professional development of these particular graduates. Although other Masters programmes such as the MA in Education could be described as vocational, it is only the MBA which insists that students must be working in senior management roles before commencing the programme, and in contrast to other Masters programmes, a substantial proportion of students on the MBA programme are sponsored by their employer.

A breakdown of the graduates who responded to this survey according to category of degree shows that:

- 56% completed a Bachelors degree
- 19% completed a Masters degree
- 25% completed an MBA

Data Analysis Methods

In order to collect and analyse the data from the questionnaire in a logical and rigorous manner, I decided to try out the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). I was able to acquire this through my place of work and received some initial training from a colleague, but I quickly realised that in order to make full use of this package I would need to dedicate a considerable amount of time in getting to grips with the statistical procedures. After some trial and error I came to the conclusion that all I needed in order to analyse my data was to draw up a coding frame and to use a simple Excel spreadsheet. I had given some thought to coding when designing my questionnaire so that when the replies began to arrive, it would be a relatively easy job to transfer the data onto the spreadsheet using the pre-arranged codes. This worked well for the closed questions, but the questionnaire also included six open questions that asked for free text, and which therefore needed different handling. I found the easiest way to cope with the two types of data was to key in all the data to the closed questions first, and when I had

a batch of approximately twenty questionnaires, to read through all the free text data and to code this by hand. I found that typing out the free text data, although time-consuming, meant that I had a more comprehensive and permanent record which allowed me to sort and re-sort into categories through “cutting” and “pasting”. I found this to be an invaluable aid in helping me to see the emergence of categories, and also provided me with some useful illustrative quotations. A copy of the coding frame for the closed questions with variables can be found in Appendix 4. The quotes below are coded “QQ” to indicate that they have come from the questionnaires rather than from the subsequent telephone interviews.

Sample response data

The first mailing of the questionnaire produced a response rate of 28%, but after a further follow-up mailing a total of 135 questionnaires were eventually returned completed, giving a final response rate of 42%. Eight questionnaires were returned indicating that the recipient was unknown at that address. Taking into account the fact that the majority of the participants in this research had completed their studies with the Open University and therefore had no further reason to keep in touch or to notify the University of a change of address, it is to be expected that a small percentage of the questionnaires would not reach their intended respondents.

A breakdown of the numbers of graduates in each of the three countries sampled is as follows:

Belgium	169
Greece	75
Spain	79
Total	<u>323</u>

The reason for the larger number of graduates in Belgium is that the figure includes a cohort of 80 MBA students who were sponsored by their employer, IBM, which has its headquarters in Brussels.

A breakdown of the numbers of responses from the three countries sampled is as follows:

Belgium	59	(35% response rate)
Greece	37	(49% response rate)
Spain	39	(49% response rate)
Total	135	

The lower response rate from Belgium is again possibly accounted for by the higher mobility rate of the IBM MBA cohort who, as employees of a multinational company, are likely to have been moved on to work in other countries. Fig 5.1 shows a breakdown of degree awards per country:

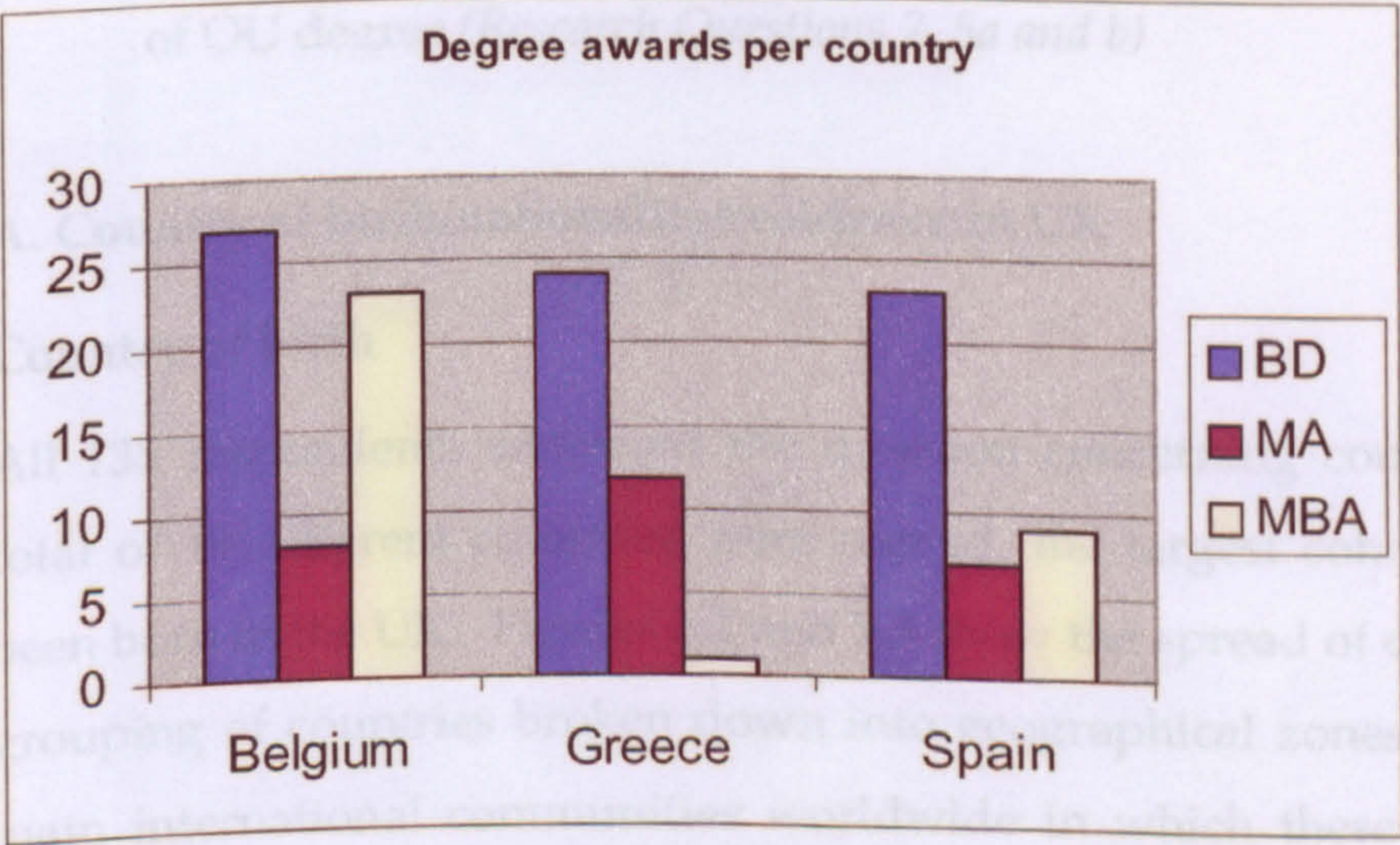


Fig 5.1 A breakdown of degree awards per country.

As explained above, the high number of MBA awards in Belgium is due to the inclusion in the survey of a cohort of IBM employees. The low number of MBA awards in Greece can be accounted for by the fact that Greece is not a target location for the Open University Business School and there is no local marketing agent in Greece, unlike in Belgium and Spain.

Analysis of data from questionnaires

The data received from the questionnaires and the links between data and research questions, can be categorised as follows:

- A. Country of birth, nationality, length of residence in present country, reasons for residence in present country and experience of living in UK/Republic of Ireland. (*Research Question 1a*)
- B. Main language, ranking of English amongst other languages, use of English, problems caused if English not main language (*Research Question 1b*)
- C. Educational background, school-leaving age, highest level of qualifications prior to studying with the OU, qualifications gained with OU, any history of education in UK or English speaking community (*Research Question 1c*)
- D. Reasons for studying with OU, personal and professional development resulting from OU studies, difficulties in using or gaining recognition of OU degree (*Research Questions 2, 5a and b*)

A. Country of birth/nationality/residence in UK

Country of birth

All 135 respondents answered the question concerning country of birth. A total of 19 different countries were named, the largest cohort (37%) having been born in the UK. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show the spread of countries and the grouping of countries broken down into geographical zones, illustrating the main international communities worldwide in which these graduates have their origins:

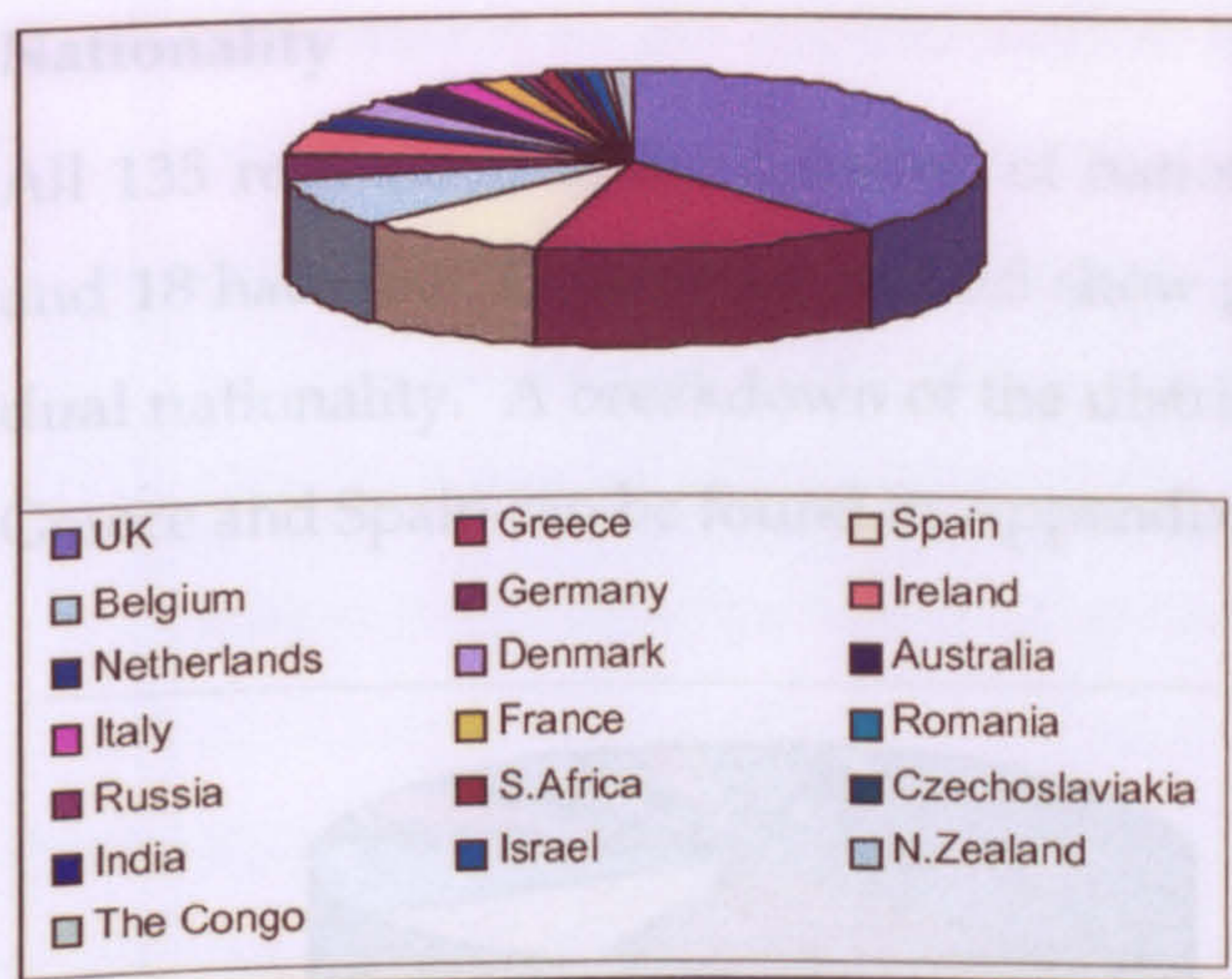


Fig.5.2 Countries of birth

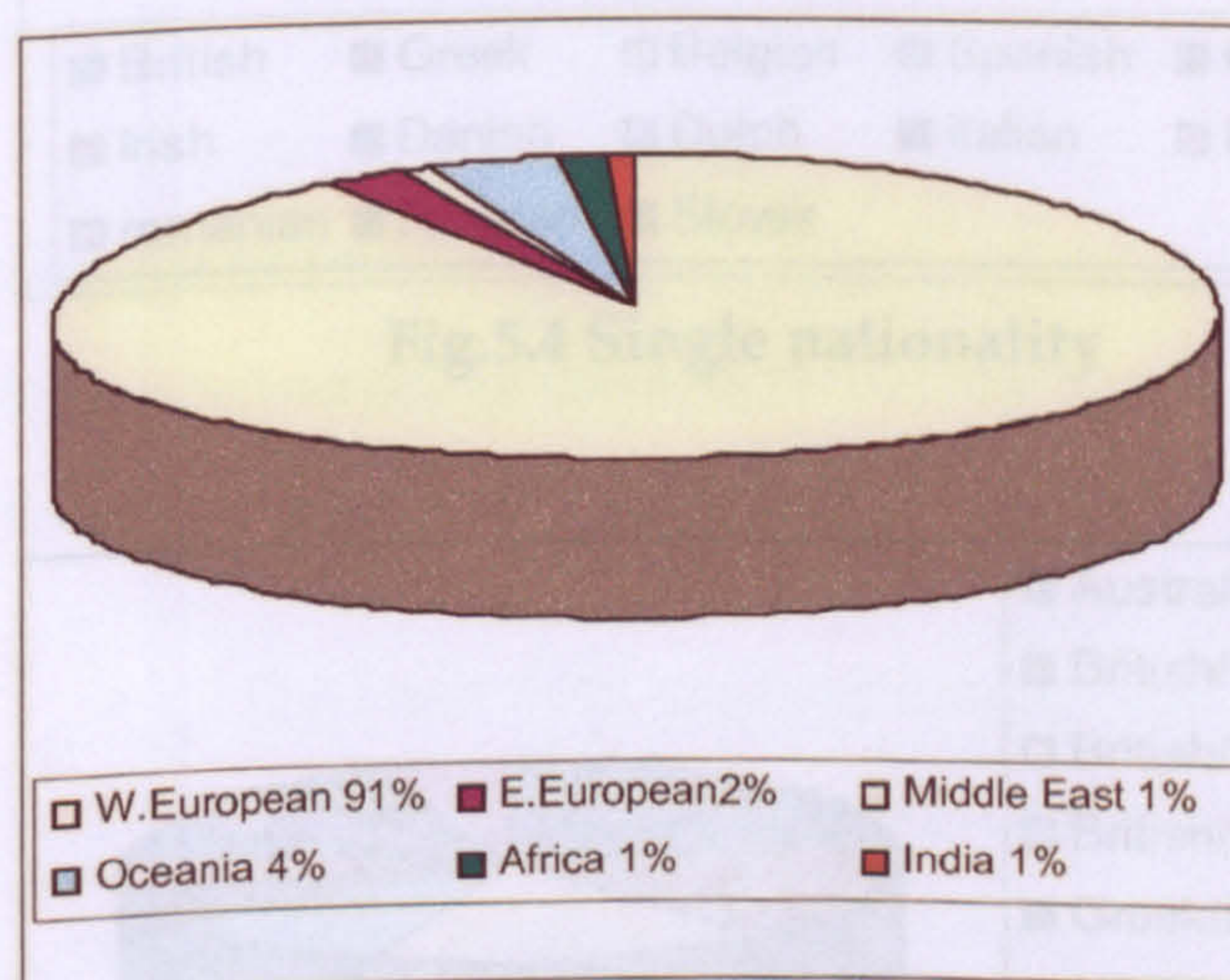


Fig.5.3 Geographical Zones

When this data was broken down by current country of residence, (see Appendix 5) it became apparent that:

- Spain had the highest proportion of British expatriates (55%, as opposed to 30% in Belgium and 28% in Greece)
- Greece had the highest percentage of home nationals (55%, as opposed to 21% Belgians in Belgium and 28% Spanish in Spain)
- Belgium had the greatest number of different nationalities amongst the OU graduate population with graduates born in 16 different countries in its sample, in contrast to Greece where there were only representatives from five countries, and in Spain from six.

Nationality

All 135 responded to the question of nationality. 117 had single nationality and 18 had dual. Figures 5.4 and 5.5 show groupings according to single and dual nationality. A breakdown of the distribution of nationalities in Belgium, Greece and Spain can be found in Appendix 6.



Fig.5.4 Single nationality

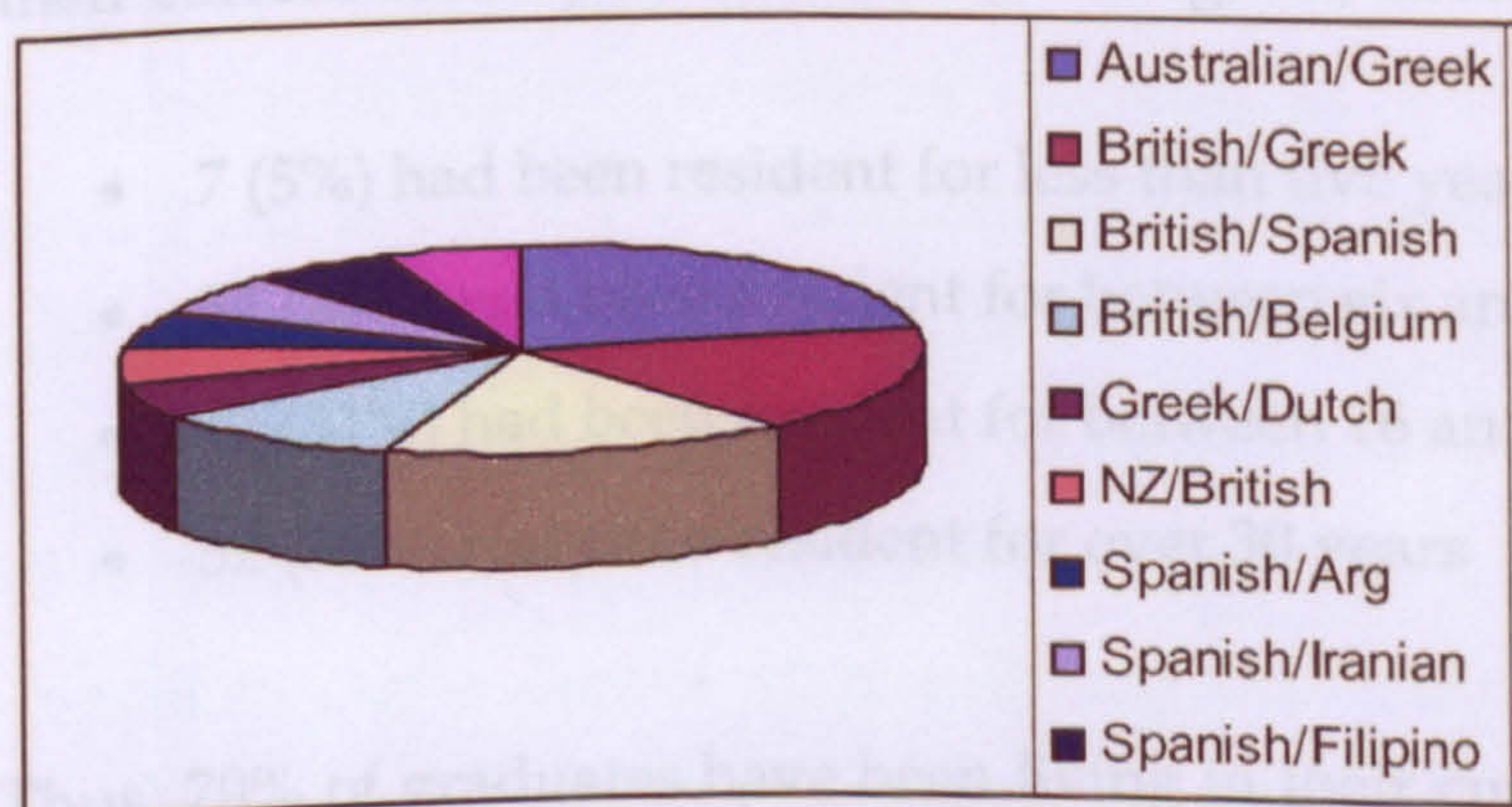


Fig 5.5 Dual nationality

The data received on nationality provides the following items of interest:

- there are 13 different single nationalities represented by the sample and nine combinations of dual nationality
- the largest single grouping per nationality is, unsurprisingly, the British (37%) followed by the Greeks, the Belgians and the Spaniards respectively
- that the number of graduates claiming British nationality who were not born in the UK is 4%
- that Belgium is the most cosmopolitan of the three countries

represented in the sample, with a total of 15 nationalities among its resident OU graduate population

- that the country with the largest number of “home” nationals who have graduated from the OU in this sample is Greece, with 58% of its OU graduate population being Greek, in contrast to 27% Belgians in Belgium and 30% Spaniards in Spain.

Whilst it is not surprising that the British account for over one third of OU graduates in this cohort, it is important to realise the implications of this figure; the remaining 63% of graduates in this sample are non-British, and therefore have been studying in a cross-cultural context.

Length of residence

When asked about the length of time the respondents as a group had lived in their current country of residence (i.e. Belgium, Greece or Spain):

- 7 (5%) had been resident for less than five years
- 34 (25%) had been resident for between six and 15 years
- 42 (31%) had been resident for between 16 and 30 years
- 52 (39%) had been resident for over 30 years

Thus, 70% of graduates have been living in their current country of residence for 16 or more years while only 5% had lived there for five years or fewer, indicating that, contrary to previous research into the OU student body in CE (Regan, 1998), this sample was not highly mobile. Perhaps the difference in findings can be explained by the fact that this sample is made up of graduates who have successfully completed their degrees and in some cases are well-established in their career or life paths, whereas previous research concentrated on students, some of whom are still in the process of carving out a career pathway. The bar charts in Appendix 7 show these figures broken down per country and indicate similar patterns of residence in each, with the exception of Greece where almost half (48%) of graduates had lived there for

over 30 years (as opposed to 37% of graduates in Belgium and 31% in Spain). This reflects the higher proportion of Greek nationals amongst the OU graduate population in Greece.

When those who were living in a country other than their country of birth were asked the reasons for their residence, in two-thirds of cases the reasons given were connected to employment, either their own or that of their spouse or partner.

Residence in the UK

Of particular significance is that 67 (50%) of the respondents had spent some time in the UK, of whom 75% had spent over five years, indicating the strong links that exist for many of these graduates with Britain and British culture. Bearing in mind that 37% of the sample had been born in the UK and 39% claim single or dual British nationality (i.e. the expatriate community), there remains a significant number of respondents who are not British but who have lived in the UK and experienced British culture. Although it would be difficult to trace links between a period of time spent living in the UK and the subsequent choice of the OU as a provider of education, and even more difficult to make causal links between time spent in the UK and successful completion of a degree with a British university, I felt that it would be interesting to explore this relationship in more depth, and therefore decided to include some questions to this effect in the telephone interviews.

Summary of findings for Section A

The findings from this section of the questionnaire have highlighted the cultural diversity among the OU graduate body in CE, with 12 single and 18 dual nationalities represented. It can only be presumed that some of these dual nationalities are the result of marriage but the laws concerning nationality differ in every country and it is beyond the remit of this research to investigate this further. The high proportion of dual nationalities does, however, reinforce the notable level of stability or permanence within this

particular sample. The findings also confirm the significant proportion of British expatriates amongst this community. Although over half the sample had spent 20 years or more in the UK, there are still significant numbers of non-British nationals who have spent meaningful periods of time in the UK, thus increasing their chances of having experienced aspects of British cultural and educational traditions.

B. English Language

All 135 respondents answered the first question in this section asking them what they regarded to be their main language, the language they use for everyday living.

55% of the respondents said they had one main language, of which:

- 41% said English
- 27% said Greek
- 18% said Spanish

30% of respondents identified two main languages, of which:

- 87% said English and one other language e.g. English/Dutch, English/German, English/Spanish

11% of respondents identified three main languages e.g.

English/Spanish/Catalan
4% of respondents identified four main languages e.g. Flemish/English/German/French

All 135 respondents answered the second question, which asked them to rank English amongst their languages:

- 47% gave English as their first language
- 42% as their second
- 9% as their third
- 2% as their fourth

There were a couple of interesting illustrations from bi-lingual families:

"I speak Spanish with my husband, but English to my daughter."

"I speak English with my children but French with some of my grand-children as we live in a French-speaking part of Belgium."(QQ)

For the third question in this section respondents were asked to indicate in what sort of situation they speak English, and were given a menu of options from which they could tick as many as they felt appropriate. All 135 participants answered this question, of which:

- 33% used English at home, at work and in other situations
- 25% used English at work and in other situations
- 13% used English at home and in other situations
- 10% used English at home and at work
- 10% used English only in other situations
- 8% used English only at work
- 1% used English only at home

Respondents who ticked the option "in other situations" were asked to give examples, of which the most frequent was "*in social situations*" or "*in the local Anglophone community*". English is the language used to communicate across international boundaries: "*my social group is multinational and our common language is usually English*" (Danish graduate living in Belgium) (QQ). There were other examples that demonstrated that English is the language of cultural exchange, "*Reading, TV, Films*", and from a considerate respondent:

"When using the Internet, watching TV, listening to the radio, reading job-related articles and helping foreigners find their way."(QQ)

A British graduate, living in Belgium, noted an interesting social division:

"I speak English at most social occasions, at my daughter's school and at the doctors, but not with the dentist."(QQ)

There were many examples of how English is the language of business and commerce, *"I speak English when dealing with customers"*, from a Greek national living in Greece, *"while working in an international environment"*, *"when attending conferences abroad"*, *"in teleconferences, meetings and on vacation"*, *"in seminars, networking and email communications."* The final word must come from a Belgian:

"This is Belgium, centre of the EU. English is a common language for many nationalities."(QQ)

These comments illustrate Graddol's (2001) theories about the use of English as a vehicular language for international communication and as a basis for constructing cultural identities, and confirm the view that English is most often the language used for business and in the media. It is also interesting to note the references to bilingualism in these quotations, which support Crystal's (2003) belief that bilingualism allows people to use English as a means of communicating with the wider world, while using their mother tongue to participate in their local community, thus highlighting the differences between intra- and inter-cultural exchange.

Finally, graduates with English as an additional language were asked whether this caused them any difficulties with their studies. Using categories previously deployed by Barbara Mayor in her survey on English as a language of study (Mayor, 1996), graduates were asked to rank those aspects of studying with which they had had most difficulty.. Of the 73 responses to this question, 18 (3%) perceived themselves as having difficulties. The following list emerged in order of difficulty:

1 st	Expressing academic ideas in own words	67%
2 nd	Contributing to discussions	50%
3 rd	Completing written work within time limits	39%
4 th	Reading and understanding course materials	17%
5 th	Communicating with tutor	0.5%
	Other	0.5%

I was surprised by the fact that such a low number of graduates felt that they had experienced difficulties with their studies as a result of having English as a second or third language. This is obviously a difficult area to measure. Problems in completing written work within time limits, for example, could be caused by external factors such as the pressure of work commitments or equally as a result of slow reading skills in English. The fact that two-thirds of the respondents to this question felt that they had problems in expressing academic ideas in their own words, may explain the incidences of plagiarism, as referred to in the focus group (5: 83). A survey of OU tutors with students resident in CE (Spendiff, 2000) identified studying in English as a significant problem, but only for a minority of students. Judging from the very small number of graduates who identified a problem with the language, the findings from my survey would bear this out. Perceptions of competence in language are subjective, however, and open to interpretation depending upon the viewpoint of the student or the tutor.

While looking at the linguistic needs of Open University students for whom English is not their mother tongue, it should be noted that the guidance in the University's publicity brochures is not particularly helpful: *"Your English should be of an adequate standard for undergraduate level study"* (OU, 2004). What is "adequate" and what exactly is meant by "undergraduate level study" remains unclear, and this statement raises further questions. Does an undergraduate student of mathematics require the same competence in English as an undergraduate student of English literature? Prospective students are encouraged to take a diagnostic test such as that provided by the

International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which is recommended by the British Council as a suitable generic language test of English for academic purposes. Manning & Mayor (1999) fear that whether students are speakers of English as a first or as an additional language, many students enter the Open University lacking the experience of academic language that would enable them to succeed. Academic conventions and the discourses of specific disciplines may prove to be effectively a “foreign language” to both groups. Breet (1995), an OU tutor, proposes a two-dimensional matrix, which acknowledges the interaction between language and educational background, leading to at least four distinct types of student:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. English first
(or only) language.
Educated within the UK | 3. English second
(or additional) language
Educated within UK |
| 2. Ditto.
Educated outside UK | 4. Ditto
Educated outside UK |

This model does not take account of previous educational level, which can be a key factor in accessing the curriculum. Students in Quadrant 4, for example, may lack familiarity with Anglo-Saxon academic writing and may lack the particular English vocabulary for the subject under discussion. They may also have problems recognising the British cultural context. Once again, it is important to remember that the participants in this study are graduates reflecting back on their experiences of studying with the Open University, and as such, have already proved that their competence in English was adequate to the task in hand.

Summary of findings from Section B

It is clear that this sample of OU graduates considered themselves to be frequent users of the English language. All respondents counted English as one of their main languages, with 47% ranking English as their first language and a further 42% as their second. These are lower percentage than the 57%

recorded by Regan's (1998) study, but the terms "main" and "first" are easily misunderstood and are open to misinterpretation. What is evident is that the majority of respondents in this survey are bi- or multi-lingual and are practised at adapting to the linguistic demands of a British undergraduate degree. In hindsight, only a very small percentage recalled having problems with their studies as a result of their competence in English. Judging from the situations in which they used English, it is apparent that the language is employed as an intercultural tool to communicate across international boundaries in social and work situations.

C. Educational background

The questions in this section of the questionnaire centred on the graduates' educational history including their experience, if any, of the British educational system. The reason for extracting this data was to find out how many OU graduates living in CE had previously studied in a British school or college and how many came to the OU with no previous knowledge of British academic customs and traditions, and therefore could truly be described as having studied in a different cultural context. Unfortunately, I felt that the questions in this section were the least successful in the questionnaire. Two of the questions appeared to ask for the same information – *"In which country or countries did you attend school?"* and *"Did any of your education take place in the UK or another English speaking country, and if so for how many years?"* Some of the respondents simply put a line through the latter question to indicate that they felt that they had answered it already without answering the second part. This means that although I have valuable data about the number of graduates who have been through the British educational system, I don't have reliable data about the length of time they spent there. I also realise with hindsight that the question on school-leaving age, *"At what age did you leave secondary school/enseignement secondaire/gymnasion/lykeion/educacion secundaria?"* was open to misinterpretation, as the concept can mean different things in different countries. This question is one which I now feel to be irrelevant as I have no data with which to compare it, and I remain unconvinced that school

leaving age bears any particular significance on an individual's personal or professional development after graduation.

All respondents answered the first question about where they attended school and the results show that they had been educated in 32 different countries. Fig. 5.6 shows the spread of countries, with the highest percentage (30%) being educated in the UK.

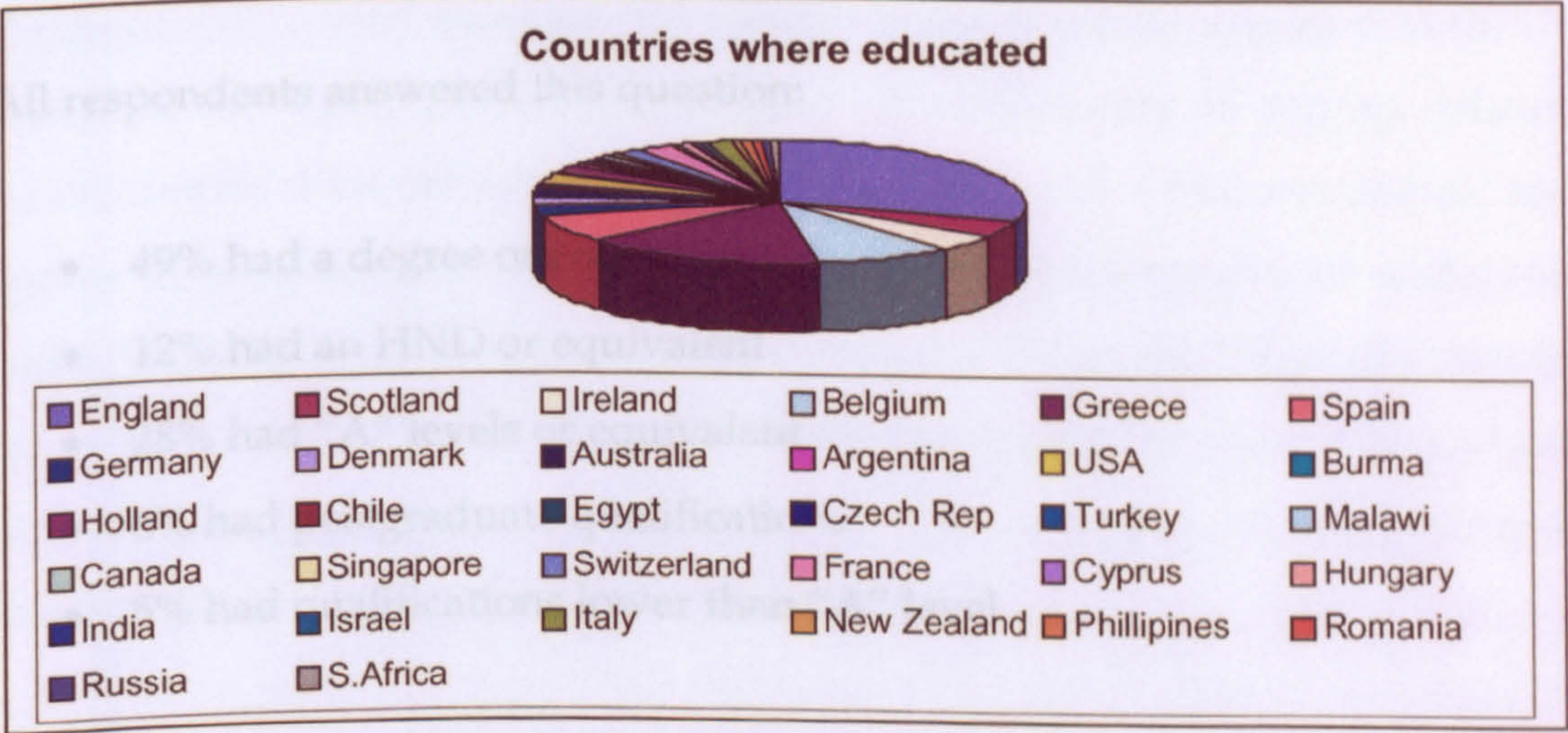


Fig 5.6 Countries where educated

Twenty per cent of respondents had attended school in two different countries, and two graduates had actually attended school in four different countries (the first in Spain, England, Switzerland and France, and the second in England, Turkey, Chile and the Republic of Ireland). Graduates in this situation must acquire valuable skills in learning how to adapt to different educational systems with great speed, and this early mobility may also help to explain their linguistic competence. Fifty per cent of the sample had been educated at some point in their childhood in English-speaking, post-colonial countries which corroborates the data about nationality and explains the high level of competence in the English language.

Graduates were asked about their highest level of qualification before joining the OU and were asked to choose one of four categories:

- a) "A" levels/Bachillerato or equivalent
- b) HND/Graduate/Ptychion TEI or equivalent
- c) Honours degree/Kandidaat/Ptychion AEI/Licenciado or equivalent
- d) Other

All respondents answered this question:

- 49% had a degree or equivalent
- 12% had an HND or equivalent
- 28% had "A" levels or equivalent
- 6% had postgraduate qualifications
- 5% had qualifications lower than "A" level

A breakdown of previous qualifications by country is given in Appendix 12 and demonstrates a very similar pattern in all three countries, with the majority of respondents having the equivalent of a Bachelors degree.

This data is compatible with data from a survey of new OU students in both the UK and CE that was carried out by the OU's Institute of Educational Technology (IET, 2000). This survey compared the previous educational attainment of CE students to that of UK students and found that less than 10% of CE students had qualifications lower than "A" level equivalent, in comparison with 44% of UK-based students.

Summary of findings from Section C

The key findings from the data collected in this section of the questionnaire concern the wide radius of countries and continents in which these graduates attended school, the fact that half of them had attended school for a period of time in an English-speaking environment, and the high level of previous educational attainment before starting their OU studies. The fact that 49% of OU graduates living in CE already had a first degree before joining the OU raises the question of motivation. It indicates that perhaps the OU has a different role to play amongst this student body. It would appear that for CE students, the Open University provides an opportunity to top-up existing qualifications, for example from a Bachelors degree to a Masters degree, and serves as a vehicle for continuing professional development, or additional higher or vocational education. By contrast, the OU in the UK is still seen by many as a second chance route to a Bachelors degree for those who did not attend university after leaving school. The question of motivation is examined in the final section of the questionnaire.

Age range

Data on age range was obtained from the Open University student database (CIRCE) and not as a result of my survey. I have included it here, as it has some relevance to the issues of motivation for study and personal and professional development. Fig. 5.7 illustrates the age range of all the participants in the survey. A breakdown per country can be found in Appendix 8.

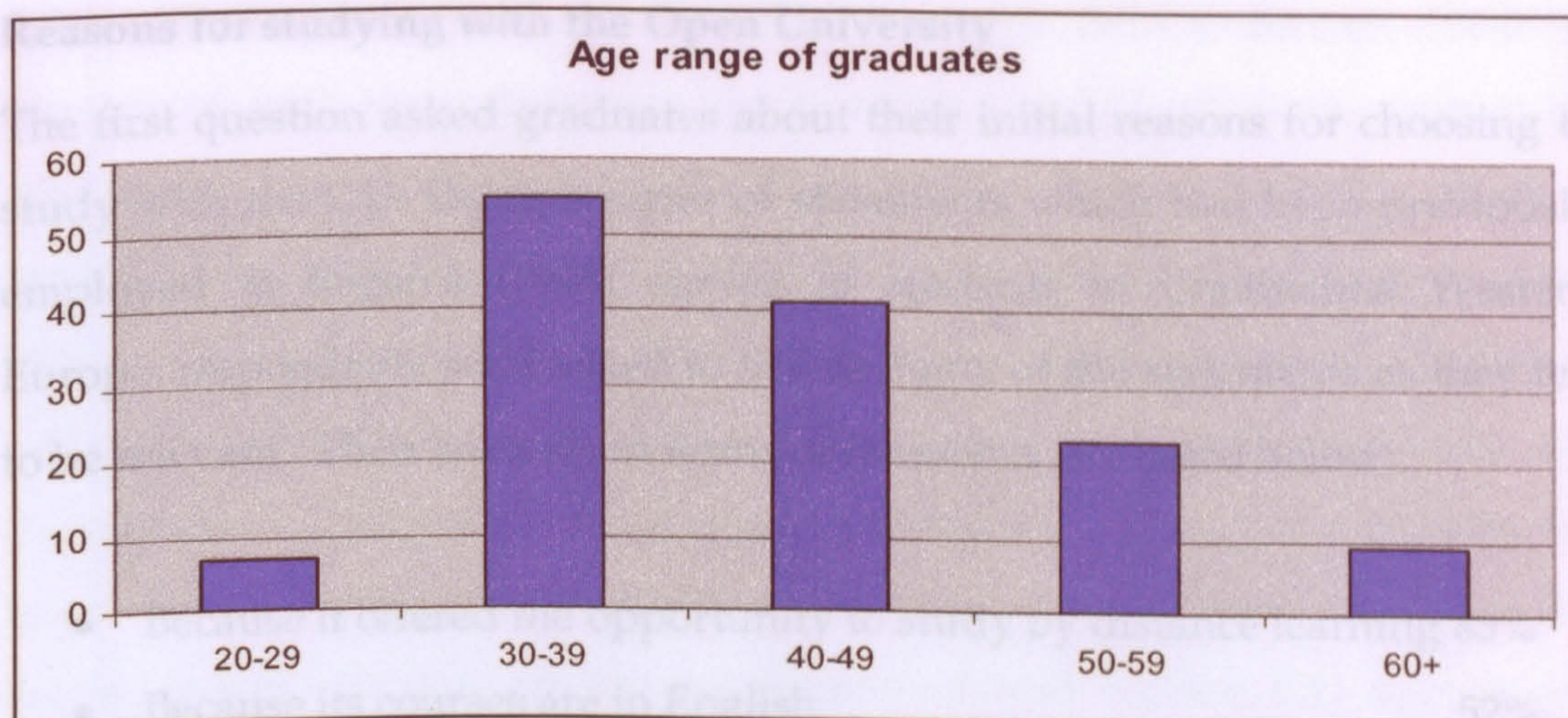


Fig 5.7 Age range of graduates

The chart shows that:

- the majority (71%) of graduates across all three countries are in the 30-49 age range,
- 5% are aged between 20-29.
- 17% are aged 50-59,
- 7% are aged over 60,

Looking at individual countries (Appendix 8), this pattern is duplicated in Belgium and Greece, but Spain has a substantially larger percentage of graduates (87%) in the 30-49 age range, but only 5% in their fifties, 5% over 60 and 3% in their twenties.

D. Personal and professional development

The questions in this section were concerned with initial reasons for studying with the OU, the outcomes in terms of personal and professional development, and the issue of recognition of OU qualifications in CE. All the questions provided a menu of options from which respondents could tick as many as they felt appropriate. The use of an option entitled "other" meant that there was also the provision for free text.

Reasons for studying with the Open University

The first question asked graduates about their initial reasons for choosing to study with the OU. Using a series of statements which had been previously employed in Regan's (1998) survey of students in Continental Western Europe, respondents were asked to tick as many of the statements as they felt to be relevant. Their answers in terms of frequency are listed below:

- Because it offered the opportunity to study by distance learning 83%
- Because its courses are in English 52%
- Because I wanted to develop my interest in a particular subject 50%
- Because of its flexibility across international boundaries 41%
- Because I wanted to make up for missed opportunities 38%
- Because I wanted to change my career 25%
- Because I wanted to gain a degree from a UK university 25%
- Because there is no suitable alternative where I live 25%

It is clear from these figures that the overwhelming attraction of the OU is the nature of its delivery and the flexibility that distance education provides. Over half the respondents said that they chose it because its courses are in English, a somewhat lower percentage than I would have expected given the high proportion (87%) of respondents who stated that English was one of their two main languages. However, this does serve to confirm the belief expressed in the focus group (5:82) that one of the main attractions of the OU is that its courses are offered in English. Fifty per cent of the respondents also said that they chose the OU because they wanted to develop their interest in a particular subject, thus emphasising the importance of the curriculum to this particular cohort of graduates. Of less importance was the opportunity to change career (25%). A significant proportion (38%) stated that they decided to study with the OU because they wanted to make up for missed opportunities, which runs contrary to the suggestion reached in the previous section (5:106) about the role of the OU for graduates in CE who already have first degrees.

Appendix 13 shows the reasons for studying with the OU broken down by country of residence. Although the fact that the OU offers its courses by distance learning is the most popular reason in all three countries, there is some interesting divergence of opinion between countries in relation to other factors. In Belgium the fact that the university offers its courses in English is far more important than in Greece. This can perhaps be explained by the cosmopolitan nature of the graduate population in Belgium, tied in with the large numbers employed in international organisations where English is the lingua franca. In Greece the curriculum offered by the OU is a major attraction, given the lack of choice in local provision. In Spain, there is little interest in the opportunity to change career, but the flexibility and the breadth of the curriculum were the major incentives for choosing to study with the OU.

Among the 15% who wrote some free text, the main reason given was related to their work. Some MBA graduates pointed out that their employer, IBM, had sponsored them through the OU, others gave specific examples:

"the local Spanish courses in education were less relevant to my area of work"
(British graduate living in Spain) (QQ)

"since I work in a US company and English degree is welcome" (Belgian living in Belgium) (QQ)

"to be able to teach in international schools I needed a piece of paper to prove I was educated" (British graduate living in Spain) (QQ)

Other reasons given were specifically related to the context of living in a different country, *"the OU study provided necessary mental stimulation at a time when I had recently moved countries and was not working"* (British graduate living in Greece). (QQ)

Some commented favourably on the range of courses offered by the OU in comparison with local education institutions:

“I had started studying with the Spanish University UNED – equivalent to the OU, but realised I had no appetite to study Spanish Filology in Spanish. Also Spanish university tends to do a lot of things superficially whereas Britain does less more deeply”
(Spanish graduate living in Spain). (QQ)

Personal development

The second question asked graduates if they felt that their OU degree had helped them to develop themselves, and if so in what ways. Again, respondents were presented with a menu of eight options (derived from the 1996 Graduate Survey) (OU, 1996) and were asked to tick as many as they felt appropriate, plus a further option “other” which invited free text. All respondents answered this question, of which 98% replied positively that it had helped them to develop themselves, in the following ways:

- By becoming more knowledgeable 80%
- By proving something to myself 63%
- By allowing me to see things in a different way 60%
- By widening my experience in life 58%
- By allowing me to evaluate facts more objectively 56%
- By giving me confidence to contribute to discussions and debates 53%
- By improving my skills in language and expression 44%
- By giving me the ability to think independently 39%

Amongst the 10% who wrote some free text, the majority highlighted improvements in self-esteem and the fulfilment of personal ambitions. Some commented on specific skills that they had acquired from their studies, for example; *“balancing business decisions and operational needs”* (British MBA

graduate living in Belgium), *"learning about current academic jargon in the field"* (British BSc graduate living in Greece), *"improving my ability to deal with all kinds of pupils with or without learning difficulties"*, (Greek MA in Education graduate living in Greece).

Others appreciated the opportunity to experience different academic approaches to teaching and learning; *"my degree helped me to improve inter-cultural knowledge: how to teach, how to communicate"* (Spanish graduate living in Spain), *"by discovering new ways of studying: in Belgium studies are more theoretical. I found the way to learn in England more based on the real world"* (Belgian graduate living in Belgium). There was one dissenting voice, however, from a native of Newcastle upon Tyne, who stated that: *"the OU has a tendency towards brainwashing."*

These findings echo those of the most recent survey of OU graduates (OU, 1996) in which graduates were asked to state their aims, both at the beginning and at the end of their studies. The survey offered ten statements about aims and asked which were important and whether students felt they had achieved them. 91% of the graduates in the survey agreed that "proving something to myself" was an important aim and 66% agreed with the aim of "widening my experience of life".

Professional development

The response to the third question in the survey, which asked graduates about whether their studies had helped them to develop professionally and if so in what ways, was less positive than the question about personal development, and there was less agreement about the ways in which having a degree had been of benefit.

133 respondents (98%) answered this question, of which 75% agreed that it had helped them to develop professionally. They were given seven options, again derived from the Graduate Survey (OU, 1996) of which they could tick

as many as they felt appropriate, plus a free text option. Their replies were as follows:

- By learning things relevant to my work 70%
- By improving my status at work 45%
- By giving me the knowledge and skills to start a new career 39%
- By improving my promotion prospects 35%
- By gaining a qualification using the English language 32%
- By giving me a qualification that has helped me to find a better paid job 29%
- By gaining a qualification from a UK university 16%

Amongst the 10% who provided free text, examples of professional development divided into two main categories:

- a) Extended knowledge and new ideas which could be used in the workplace:

“The student experience shed new light on my attitude to teaching, learning new academic skills which were not part of degree courses 25 years ago and giving me confidence in my own abilities” (MA in Education graduate from Greece). (QQ)

- b) Improved status externally and among colleagues:

“More admiration of peers: It is in their esteem that I have grown, not necessarily in my own esteem” (Flemish MBA graduate in Belgium) (QQ)

“In Spain, the more degrees the better even if it is totally unrelated to your profession” (Spanish BSc graduate in Spain). (QQ)

It is not surprising that there were fewer responses and less agreement amongst respondents to this question than to the previous question about personal development. It is to be hoped that all graduates can identify some ways in which they have developed personally as a result of studying for a degree. If not, those of us working in higher education have something to worry about! However, we know that 7% of the graduates in this sample were aged 60 or over when they graduated and therefore we can presume that professional development was not high on their agenda. Only 25 % initially studied for a degree with the express purpose of changing their career, although some may have been studying with a view to gaining promotion within their current career – unfortunately this precise question was not asked. It is interesting to note, however, that when asked to reflect on how their degree had helped them professionally, a much higher percentage (39% as opposed to 25%) stated that their degree had helped them to acquire the knowledge and skills to start a new career, and 35% stated that their degree had helped them to improve their promotion prospects. It would appear, therefore, that the reasons students gave initially for studying with the OU changed over time, and by the time they had graduated and had had the opportunity to reflect on how they had benefited from their degree, their responses were more favourable.

When analysing the replies about professional development, it is interesting to note that the Belgian graduates were most positive (93% felt that their OU degree had helped them to develop professionally, as opposed to 88% of Spanish graduates, 78% of British graduates and 68% of Greek graduates). This could be explained by the greater recognition of OU degrees among the international organisations based in Belgium and the more numerous employment opportunities therein (1:16) as opposed to the lack of recognition of OU degrees in Greece and the higher unemployment rates amongst graduates in Spain.

Career development

Those graduates who felt that their degree had helped them to develop professionally were asked to give information about the type of work they were doing before they started their studies with the OU, and the type of work they were currently doing at the time of completing the questionnaire. 56% of respondents replied to this question. There appeared to be three main categories of identifiable career development:

- Promotion within the same company
- Career development within the same field but not necessarily within the same organisation
- Career change into a new area of work

A close examination of the examples given below shows a correlation between the nature of the career development experienced and the qualification gained with the OU. MBA graduates tended to either stay within the same company or move to a company in a similar area of work and get promotion on the grounds of their MBA. This is not surprising given the fact that many MBA graduates are sponsored by their employer, and that this particular sample included MBA graduates sponsored by IBM in Belgium; *"Project Manager...now working on strategy, budgets and finance"* (Danish graduate living in Belgium, MBA), *"Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of IBM Romania...now Manager of IBM Global Financing"* (Romanian now living in Austria, previously resident in Belgium, MBA).

"I was an administrative assistant supporting internet consultants. With my degree from the OU I became a consultant within 6 months of obtaining my degree" (French graduate living in Belgium, MBA) (QQ)

Graduates with a Masters degree (other than the MBA) tended to stay within their current field and experienced career development or career

enhancement as a result of gaining their degree. The most popular Masters programme was the MA in Education, which accounted for 66% of Masters graduates. This group felt that they had developed simply by becoming more knowledgeable and competent in their particular branch of education. In four specific cases where the graduate was teaching in the private sector, the MA in Education was used as a substitute qualification for gaining qualified teacher status, allowing the graduate to gain promotion or move higher up the salary scale:

“English teacher for many years but never did PGCE in UK ... the MA in Ed improved my pay scale and certainly helped me get current job” (British graduate living in Greece, MA in Ed) (QQ)

“TEFL teacher ... I now work as an Oral Examiner for Cambridge ESOL exams as well as teaching English” (British graduate living in Greece, BA) (QQ)

“I was doing EFL teaching and teaching for the OU ... I’m doing the same, but (I hope) doing it better ”(British graduate living in Greece, MA in Ed) (QQ)

Graduates with Bachelors degrees appeared to make the most significant career changes, as illustrated by some of the examples below:

“Para-legal work in Edinburgh – highly paid, very boring...now translator and animal welfare – badly paid (translation) not paid at all (animal welfare) but not boring” (Scot living in Greece, BSc) (QQ)

“Working at local taverna and manual work...now have started my own travel business (British graduate living in Greece, BA) (QQ)

“Mostly admin & project work...now coaching executives, human resources and leadership development consultancy ”(Irish graduate living in Belgium, BSc) (QQ)

The responses to this question also highlighted a correlation between the type of employment undertaken by OU graduates and the employment opportunities in their country of residence. In Belgium, 14% of OU graduates in the sample were employed by the European Commission and used their degrees to gain promotion to a higher grade. The quotation below was one of several in a similar vein:

“I was a secretary (C-grade) in the European Commission, frustrated at not being able to advance further. The OU gave me the confidence to apply, and pass, to a higher category (B-grade)” (British graduate in Belgium, BSc) (QQ)

In Greece and Spain a notable proportion (19% and 15% respectively) of OU graduates (both nationals and expatriates), worked as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) teachers, either self-employed or in the private sector. The quotations below are typical examples:

“I was first a receptionist telephonist in England and then a housewife in Greece ...now I teach English privately and hope in the future to teach at a private school” (British graduate living in Greece, MA in Ed) (QQ)

“Lecturer, Language Institute...Director, Language Institute” (Spanish graduate living in Spain, BA) (QQ)

There were some interesting but contradictory comments about the value attributed to their degree by employers, which point to cultural differences in attitudes towards qualifications and job titles, issues which are explored in more depth in the following section on recognition.

"I haven't really changed the type of work (analyst programmer) ... it is just that (somewhat strangely) people seem to appreciate my degree more than the experience I already had in my type of work" (Dutch living in Belgium, BSc) (QQ)

"I was working as a simple secretary...I got promotion as an Assistant of CEO, was appreciated more and valued. I am currently beginning seeing clients under supervision" (Greek living in Greece, BSc Hons Psychology) (QQ)

"Before I started my degree I was a Senior QA (Quality Assurance) manager...now I have graduated I am a QC (Quality Control) Manager. However, I have switched from US company to Belgian company, where titles are "deflated" and what you do is more important than the title you carry" (Belgian living in Belgium, MBA) (QQ)

"Functional analyst with software company...much the same but now it's called "Senior business architect" and I've got much more flexibility to fit work around family commitments" (British graduate living in Belgium, MBA) (QQ)

Recognition

The issue of recognition of OU qualifications outside of the UK elicited a vociferous response that highlighted the differences experienced in the three countries. Respondents were asked if they had experienced any difficulties in gaining recognition of their OU degree by: a) other educational institutions, b) the Government and c) employers:

a) Educational institutions:

84 respondents (62%) answered this question, of whom:

- 60 (71%) said "no"
- 24 (29%) said "yes"

Of those who had experienced difficulties, 11% were living in Belgium, 36% in Spain and 54% in Greece.

b) The Government:

94 respondents (70%) answered this question, of whom:

- 50 (53%) said "no"
- 44 (47%) said "yes"

Of those who had experienced difficulties, 13% were living in Belgium, 52% in Spain and 87% in Greece.

c) Employers:

82 (61%) answered this question, of whom:

- 60 (73%) said "no"
- 22 (27%) said "yes"

Of those who had experienced difficulties, 18% were living in Belgium, 35% in Spain and 41% in Greece.

It is very noticeable that in all three cases the greatest problems of recognition have been found in Greece. Many graduates took the opportunity of the free text option to expand on the difficulties they had encountered, and in some cases to try and explain the reason behind this problem, as the following quotations demonstrate:

"Open University is not recognised in Greece. Both the educational institutions and the government do not accept my degree as a BSc."(QQ)

"The Government does not recognise degrees gained through distance learning nor from private institutions."(QQ)

"My Masters in Education has been rejected by the Greek education department in respect to a teaching licence. Please note a Greek national can obtain the same licence with just a proficiency in English diploma!"(QQ)

This problem with recognition in Greece has led to disappointment and scepticism among some of the respondents, and their responses have implications for future action by the Open University:

"My own boss says that the OU degree is not so strong and not the same as other universities. In this case you must make the necessary steps in order to prove to people that OU is equal with other Universities. Please send something about that to the institutions of the European Union." (QQ)

"The degree is not recognised by DIKATSA (the Greek centre for the recognition of foreign titles) and this is the main reason that I was very sceptical about continuing my studies with OU to doctorate level."(QQ)

"Greek Government denies recognition although OU has provided help to set up its own OU. But I expect nothing from people who just invest 2.1% of Greek taxpayer's money on education. Personally, I do my best for my own advancement."(QQ)

"Have no intention to change career, however was annoyed when I found out my degree is not currently recognised by the Greek state. It gives me no further help in gaining employment/more money at state schools. I am at the same point as I was before my studies with the OU concerning state school jobs which is sad."(QQ)

Whereas the Greek authorities refuse outright to recognise degrees from the UK OU, the situation in Spain and Belgium is slightly different, but no less frustrating. In Spain graduates have to go through a lengthy and tortuous procedure of "convalidation" in order to prove that their degree from the OU is equal to that from a Spanish university. As the quotations below show, many graduates do not even attempt this process:

"An English degree is not officially recognised by the Ministry of Education in Spain. The degree is virtually of no use whatsoever in Spain as it stands. The only possible answer is to have it "convalidated" by the Ministry of Education. This is far from easy."(QQ)

"I cannot improve my employment based on my OU degree until it has been approved by the Spanish Ministry. At my age (50) I now don't have the energy to go through all the above and the expense."(QQ)

"After three years I am still waiting for the Ministry of Education in Spain to convalidate my degree."(QQ)

In Belgium there is a clear divide between the attitude shown towards OU qualifications by the European Commission or other international organisations, and that of the Belgian authorities:

"OU degrees are recognised in the EU but only with difficulty in Belgian education system." (QQ)

"My employer is the Flemish Ministry and my BA Hons is not recognised as equivalent to a Belgian licentiaat, and consequently I am not classed as a graduate, which negatively affects pay and promotion chances."(QQ)

On a positive note:

"My Belgian employer considers all non Belgian but EU degrees to be of equal merit."(QQ)

Summary

The responses to this section of the questionnaire provided interesting and at times contradictory information. It was essential when trying to make sense of this data to remember the composition of the sample, which was made up of two very different groupings: 37% British expatriates and 63% non-British nationals. This duality in the sample accounted for some of the apparent contradictions, as well as providing useful comparative data. It was clear that in Belgium, Greece and Spain, as in the UK, OU graduates use their degree in many ways and for many different purposes. For 50% of the sample, studying with the OU was an opportunity to develop their interest in a particular subject or discipline, and for 38% it provided the chance to make up for missed opportunities earlier in life. However, of the 75% of the sample who claimed that their OU degree had helped them with their professional development, a significant proportion (68%) were studying with the aim of gaining promotion or career enhancement within their field of work. This was particularly the case for students who had gained a Masters degree. The most radical career changes could be seen amongst graduates with a Bachelors degree, and it is interesting to break this sub-set down by country of residence and nationality. Figs 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10 show the nationalities of graduates with a Bachelors degree in Belgium, Greece and Spain:

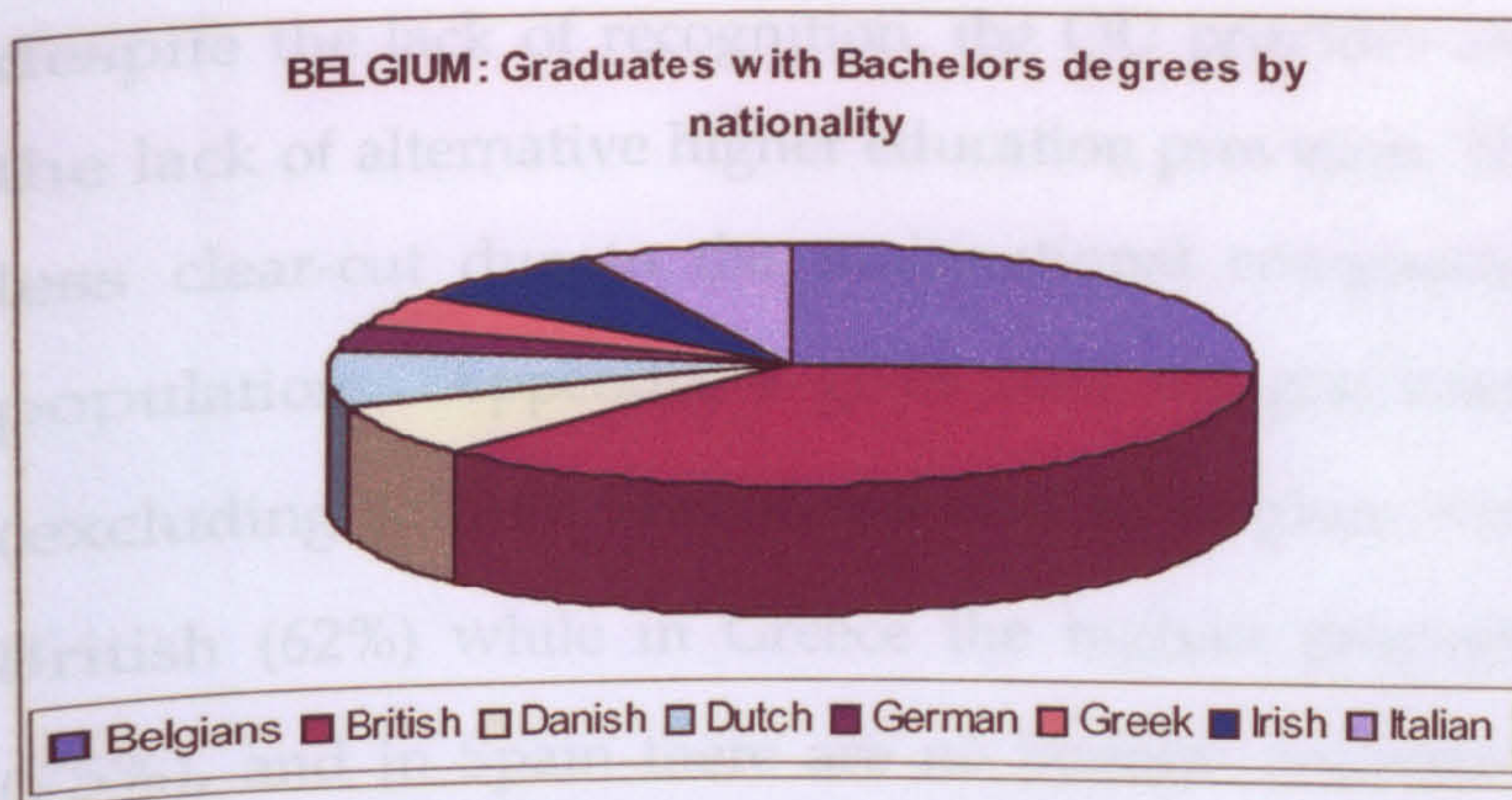


Fig 5.8 Belgium: Graduates with Bachelors degrees by nationality

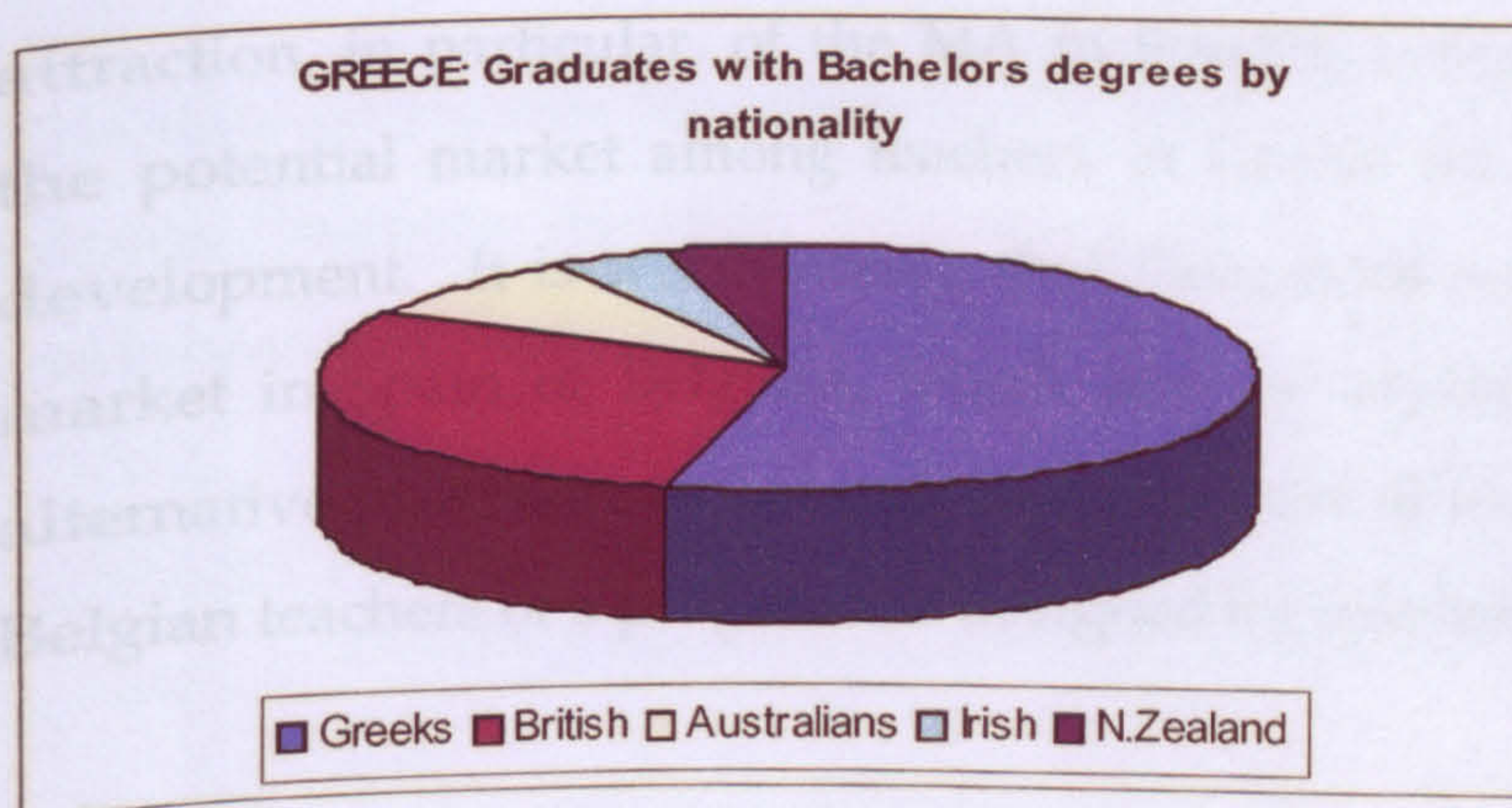


Fig 5.9 Greece: Graduates with Bachelors degrees by nationality

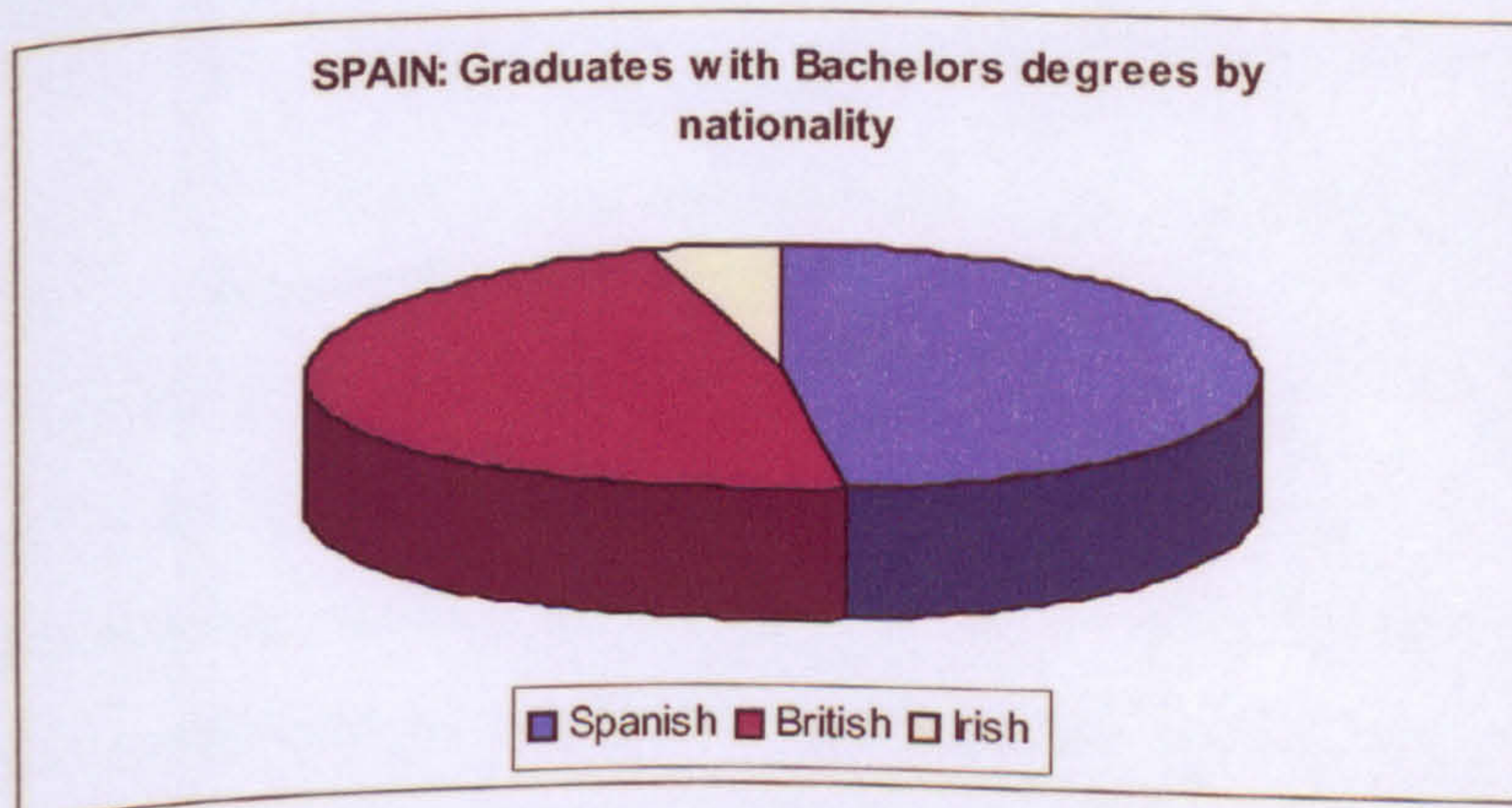


Fig 5.10 Spain: Graduates with Bachelors degrees by nationality

These figures show that the Bachelors degree attracts an equal proportion of Spanish and British nationals living in Spain, but a far higher proportion of Greek than British nationals living in Greece (29%). This demonstrates that

despite the lack of recognition, the OU provides an attractive option, given the lack of alternative higher education provision. The situation in Belgium is less clear-cut due to the multinational composition of the OU graduate population. Appendix 9 gives data for graduates with Masters degrees (excluding MBAs). This shows that in Belgium the greatest proportion are British (62%) while in Greece the highest proportion are Greek nationals (75%), and in Spain there are no Spanish nationals in the sample – all the graduates with Masters degrees are British or Irish. The high proportion of Greek nationals graduating with a Masters degree is testimony to the attraction, in particular, of the MA in Education programme and highlights the potential market among teachers in Greece for continuing professional development. It is worth noting that there does not appear to be a similar market in Spain or Belgium, which may be explained by the existence of alternative provision, or because of the perceived irrelevance to Spanish and Belgian teachers of a programme designed for teachers in the UK.

Conclusion

The questionnaire provided me with a rich source of data to analyse. I have used the data on nationality, language and educational background to build up a picture of the graduates in the sample, and by doing so have provided answers to my first research question (1:17):

1. *How can we describe OU graduates in the three specified countries in terms of:*
 - a) *Their nationality?*
 - b) *Their competence in the English language?*
 - c) *Their educational background?*

The data on reasons for studying with the OU has given me answers to the second research question and underlined the complexities involved in understanding motivation for returning to learning among adults:

2. *What were the original reasons given for choosing to study with the Open University and what factors influenced this decision?*

The data on personal and professional development and the problems experienced in gaining recognition of OU qualifications has supplied me with some answers to the final research question:

3. *What are the consequences of gaining a degree from the Open University in terms of:*
 - a. *personal development?*
 - b. *professional development?*

However, it has also highlighted a number of issues that need further investigation in the interviews, including the issue of recognition. The final section of this chapter will give a description of how I carried out these interviews and will provide an analysis of the data gathered.

PART C

Telephone Interviews

The purpose behind these interviews was to gather interpretative data from a small number of graduates on two broad areas:

- a) Their experiences of studying by distance learning with the Open University, and how this compared with any previous experience of higher education, and
- b) How this experience affected their sense of national and cultural identity.

This data would provide answers to research questions 3 and 4 (1:8). After analysing the data from the questionnaires I also wanted to explore in more depth the issue of recognition of OU qualifications, as this was evidently a cause for concern among many of the graduates sampled, so a third issue was added:

- c) The portability of academic qualifications across international boundaries

A total of 12 interviews were carried out, four from each of the three specified countries. Those interviewed were chosen from amongst the graduates who had returned the questionnaire and who had indicated that they would be prepared to take part in a follow-up interview. Using purposive sampling (Silverman, 2001), I identified respondents who appeared, from the information provided on their questionnaire, to be “information-rich” cases for in-depth study, and who illustrated different aspects of transnational education e.g. home nationals with English as a second language, expatriates who had lived abroad for some length of time and immigrants from non-European countries. I also wanted to include a cross-section of age and

gender, and to include graduates with a number of different OU qualifications. A breakdown of the final sample is given in Fig 5.11

Country of Residence	Nationality	Gender	Age	OU Award
Belgium	Belgian	Male	42	BA
Belgium	Congolese	Female	44	BSc
Belgium	German	Female	34	BSc
Belgium	Belgian	Male	48	MBA
Greece	Greek	Female	31	BA
Greece	Greek	Male	43	MA in Ed
Greece	Greek	Female	40	MSc in Psy
Greece	British	Male	47	MBA
Spain	Spanish	Male	35	MBA
Spain	British	Female	47	MBA
Spain	British	Male	50	BA
Spain	Iranian	Female	33	BSc

Fig 5.11 Table of graduates interviewed

Competence in the English language is not included in the above table, as this is a subjective connotation and difficult to measure. The only graduates interviewed with English as their first or main language were the three with British nationality. All the other graduates ranked English as their second or third language.

All the interviewees were contacted initially by email, which made the arrangements for the interviews very straightforward. I sent each graduate a description of the purpose of the interviews and a set of questions which would help guide the conversation, and asked them what date and time would suit them best. I anticipated that each interview would take between half an hour and 40 minutes. I initially approached 15 graduates expecting that not all would be available for interview, or may no longer want to be involved, and was pleased to get replies from 12 indicating that they were still happy to participate. However, even after confirming dates and times there were still two occasions when I rang the interviewee at the specified time to

find that they were either not available or had forgotten the arrangements. This meant that I had to approach two further graduates to complete my sample. The interviews were recorded on a telerecorder, which allowed for both sides of the conversation to be recorded and left me free to make additional notes while conducting the interview. Although the majority of interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes, the tendency was to take longer and two interviews actually lasted over an hour. The implications of this struck home when I was carrying out the transcribing, which I tried to do as promptly as possible after each interview. A sample copy of a transcript that has been analysed and coded can be found in Appendix 10.

Interview questions

Using Wengraf's structure for lightly structured depth interviewing (Wengraf (2001:60-64), I identified the three theory questions that I wanted to explore with the participants in these interviews, and then broke these down into interview questions that I would ask in the language of the interviewee. A copy of the interview schedule, with the thematic coding scheme, is attached as Appendix 11. The quotes below are coded "IQ" to show that they come from the interviews, rather than from the free text in the questionnaire.

Analysis of Data

The data can be categorised into three subject areas:

- perceptions of national and cultural identity
- cultural differences in approaches to teaching and learning
- the transferability of academic qualifications across international boundaries

National Identity

Interviewees were asked how they would describe themselves in terms of their nationality, and whether their sense of nationality had changed at all as a result of their studies with the OU. The concept of national identity and how

it is constructed is a complex one and it was interesting to note that I received lengthier and more thoughtful responses from the non-British graduates in my sample than from the British. The non-British contingent, with two exceptions, expressed feelings of dual or multi-nationality, whereas the expatriates said that they still felt British (or Scottish) despite, in some cases, having lived abroad for over half their lives and having married a Greek or Spaniard. Comparing the response of a Spaniard who had attended a university in the UK and married an English woman before returning to Spain:

"I consider myself to be very European, but a Spaniard also. My wife is English, so I am connected to England. I like many English systems and I think I am quite near to the British." (IQ)

with the response of a Scot (male) living in Spain:

"I still think of myself as Scottish, although it won't be long before I have spent longer here than in Scotland. I like being in continental Europe. I can imagine living here for the rest of my life. I'm not missing the UK but that doesn't mean to say I am not going to be British."(IQ)

The "markers" (Grant, 1997) used by most of the graduates to define their nationality were country of birth, language, nationality of parents, spouse or partner and a more imprecise "sense of belonging". Half the graduates interviewed were in the situation of living in a country other than their country of birth, or were married to someone of a different nationality. This often meant that they were fluent in two or more languages, which appeared to influence the way they described their nationality; *"I feel that the sense of belonging is related to the language, that is where my strongest bond is."* (German, female, living in Belgium) (IQ)

One Belgian graduate living in Brussels, with a mother who was born in Italy and an Italian wife, described his sense of national identity as follows:

"Firstly, I am a Belgian citizen, vaguely from Italian origin on my mother's side...and my wife is Italian and I speak fluent Italian with my daughter, so part of my culture now is Italian even although I am 100% Belgian. I am working in an international environment so it might explain why I was not feeling too confident with my citizenship as a Belgian. I think I might be the only Belgian guy working in my division." (IQ)

Three graduates had experienced so many different influences on their nationality that they described themselves as "European" or even "International". A further respondent was able to narrow down her nationality to "Western European", reiterating Williams' (2000) description of European culture as a culture of diversity; *"Culturally I think I am a Western European, not specifically Belgian, but let's say Belgian/French/Dutch/German, that's the sort of feeling I have."* (IQ)

It would be tempting to draw conclusions about why British nationals living in Continental Europe feel less "European" than Western Europeans who are living in another European country, and it could be argued that issues of language, mobility, geography and politics all play a part, but the size of my sample is too small to make any such claims. What is clear from these responses is that the concept of national identity is open to a variety of influences, supporting the postmodernist belief in the fragmented and reflexive nature of identity as described by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992). An illustration of this concept is given in the following statement from an Iranian female graduate, currently living in Spain; *"Oh, I still haven't found a nationality. I'm a foreigner wherever I go!"* (IQ)

In response to a supplementary question about whether studying for a degree in a different cultural setting changed the way they felt about their

nationality, the majority of non-British graduates claimed to have links with the UK already, either as a result of visiting the country on previous occasions, watching British television and films or simply being fluent in the language. It would appear that it was their interest in British culture which came first, and which subsequently influenced their decision to study with the Open University, rather than the reverse; *"I am an Anglophile...and everyone in my family loves England and British things"* (Belgian female, born in the Congo).

"I am in contact with English language speakers from nearly all over the world. I enjoy British culture and the company of British people. So, I feel Greek with a British identity" (Greek male, living in Greece) (IQ)

"I like many English systems, and I think I am quite near to the British" (Spanish, male, MBA, with English wife) (IQ)

Two graduates, however, did admit to feeling more British after their studies, especially if they had had to attend residential school in the UK:

"I think studying with the OU does create a link to another country. I mean you go to summer school and you meet many British people" (Belgian, female, BSc) (IQ)

"I am feeling very English after my studies but I am not very good at finding the right word always!" (Greek female, BSc, living in Greece). (IQ)

These quotes demonstrate an openness and enthusiasm for British education and culture among the non-British participants, and provide an example of a form of "cultural homogenisation" (Hall, 1992) in which traditional markers of identity such as nationality or religion give way to a new Anglophile marker.

Cultural differences in approaches to teaching and learning within higher education

Interviewees were asked whether they had any previous experience of studying at higher education level before joining the OU and if so, to identify any differences between the two approaches.

There was a striking uniformity between the responses from graduates who had experienced higher education in other countries. In all cases the OU's approach to teaching and learning was compared very favourably, in particular in relation to the emphasis on pragmatism within the course materials. Interviewees said they were encouraged, through the construction of assignments and projects, to apply what they had learnt to the world around them, or, specifically in the case of the MBA and MA in Education, to their workplace. Higher education in Spain, Belgium and Greece was seen to be much more theoretical in nature. There were several statements to the effect that studying for a degree in these three countries was a passive process of attending lectures, learning by rote, and reproducing what you have learnt when you are examined:

"The professor comes to the classroom, they read the lesson, and then they ask you to memorise it, and feedback what you have learned. There is no kind of...how you can use this knowledge or how it can be of benefit. It's all just repetition, learning things off by heart and reproducing the information." (Iranian, female, talking about studying in a Spanish university, BSc). (IQ)

"Studying in Belgium is very theoretic, but with the Open University, OK on the one hand you read a lot, and in some parts it is theoretic, but you can apply the theory to your real business life, and so there is a major difference there. In Belgium, the application of the theory doesn't matter, and if you have an examination, the way you do the examination is completely different...it is enough to be able to reproduce the theory; you don't have to understand the links between

the different subject matter. With the OU they really ask you in depth about the knowledge, rather than reproducing it. I believe that studying with the OU was a more profound experience, a more in-depth experience." (Belgian, male, MBA) (IQ)

"I was used to reading theories, and just learning them by heart, but now (when studying with the OU) I had to really think, and ask myself do I agree with what she (the OU tutor) is saying? The reflection on my work experience was very practical and I found it very useful." (Greek, female, MA in Education). (IQ)

One British MBA graduate living in Spain, now an MBA tutor herself with the OU, was able to comment on the differences in approaches to teaching and learning among her multinational tutorial group. She makes the point that how a student has been taught in the past will affect the way they expect to be taught in the future:

"Students from a southern European background are used to educational systems that are very much where the students have to be the receptacle for everything that is put in, and they have to regurgitate it, and there doesn't seem to be very much emphasis given on problem solving from scratch, from working things out from first principles, or even from team working. Students with British backgrounds are used to working things out from first principles, even some of the Benelux students happened to mention that the overall impression of the British is that they are pragmatic, very applied, whereas in Spanish universities it is all very theoretical. There is no doubt about it, there are big differences ...which also have implications in terms of the way people learn and the way people expect to be taught. European students tend to get trapped into answering the question without making any reference to the course material ... and they have particular difficulty with writing concisely." (IQ)

A Spanish MBA graduate echoes these comments in his description of his fellow Spanish students:

"With the OU you have to learn to answer what you have been asked, because sometimes we (Spanish) speak too much. We say many things. We talk about everything, we write about everything, but we are not very focused sometimes!"(IQ)

When the role of the tutor in the OU was compared with that of lecturer or professor in higher education institutions in other countries, a number of graduates stated that they had found their OU tutor to be more approachable and willing to discuss the concepts and ideas within the course on an equal footing. A lecturer or professor in a university in Belgium, Greece or Spain was seen as being someone who is remote and inaccessible. This is not a true comparison, given that the role of tutor in a distance learning organisation such as the OU is very different from that of the traditional academic in conventional universities. This comment from a Belgian graduate sums up these responses:

"the main difference is that the OU is much more humane and I couldn't believe that whenever I had a tutor on the 'phone, they were so friendly, polite – they really wanted me to pass in one way or another"(IQ)

In an account of a three-year collaborative project between a number of European universities to develop virtual seminars in European Studies for international delivery (CEFES, 2000), Williams identifies similar differences in academic practices between Continental European education systems. He gives examples of some southern European academics expressing unease about the idea that students might address them by their first names and preferring to maintain a certain level of distance and status between themselves and their students. The relative egalitarian Anglo-Saxon style of tuition with its attitude of politeness and encouragement towards students

was contrasted with the European norm, which is often more direct and less motivating in its effects. He also makes a distinction between the British and American preference for an inductive approach to intellectual reasoning, which uses empirical or anecdotal evidence to build up a theoretical argument, and that of the German/French/Italian tradition which is to use a deductive process, starting with theory and then applying this to practice. Clyne (1987) also identified the difference in approach between the "structure-focus" of the "US/Anglo" academic writing tradition and the "content-focus" of the more traditional "German/Continental" countries. The former approach calls for a more concise, empirically-based argument while the latter tends to be more elaborate and discursive in style.

The assessment strategies of universities in Belgium, Greece and Spain were seen to differ from that of the OU, with less continuous assessment and fewer assignments:

"In Belgium there are very few assignments, you could do whatever you liked during the year, and then at the end of the year a big exam which they tried to make as difficult as possible."(Belgian, female)(IQ)

The format of examinations also differed. In Belgium examinations are mainly oral and in some cases only last for 15-20 minutes. In Greece and Spain students sit written and oral examinations. In all three countries the examinations are more heavily weighted in terms of the overall assessment strategy than in the OU, and it is often the case that if a student fails one exam out of a group of eight or nine, they will have to retake the whole group again. The OU's policy for marking examinations also attracted praise from a graduate in Belgium:

"With the OU your exam paper is not marked by your tutor. It is marked by someone else according to a marking scheme. That does not happen in Belgium. That is so democratic!" (IQ)

The transparency of the OU marking schemes, the guidance given in assignment booklets about what is expected of the student and what the tutor will be looking for in an assignment, and the regulations concerning the resitting of examinations all received positive comments and emphasised what many respondents saw as being a more open and honest method of teaching and assessment.

The quality of the OU course materials was frequently commented upon and compared favourably to the poor quality photocopied notes from a Belgian university and “dry” textbooks from a Spanish university.

Finally, graduates were asked to comment on whether they found the content of OU courses in any way Anglocentric. Some graduates gave examples of references to British people or aspects of British life that meant nothing to them:

“Who is this Richard Branson we read about in the MBA?”

(Spanish, MBA) (IQ)

“We had a question in the exam about something called a GP fundholding scheme, which I did not understand” (Belgian, MBA(IQ))

but this was not, in the main, perceived as a problem. Non-British graduates expected to find what they often termed “an Anglo-Saxon” approach within a British university, but commented that some subjects such as biology and mathematics are more universal than the study of literature or history, which is more likely to adopt a British viewpoint.

In conclusion, it would appear that most graduates had not had any great difficulty in adapting to the OU's approaches to teaching and learning despite, in some cases, having been accustomed to a very different approach in their previous educational experiences in their own countries. Some

students had been initially surprised by the amount of continuous assessment involved, and had difficulty in writing concisely enough in order to meet assignment word limits and cut-off dates, but the overwhelming impression from the responses was of appreciation of both the high quality of the learning materials and the nature of the tutorial support provided by the OU.

The transferability of academic qualifications across international boundaries

The issue of recognition of academic qualifications is the one issue that caused the greatest concern among the interview sample, but interestingly not all graduates perceived it as an insurmountable problem. There were a couple of reflective comments from graduates in Greece, which emphasised the wider benefits of studying:

“Basically, I did this for myself. I always liked studying, and I did this because I wanted to be sure of what I was doing, because I have my own private business. In the future I would be happy for it to be recognised, if I needed it, but for the time being, I feel that I did it for myself, and nothing else.” (Greek, female, MA in Ed) (IQ)

“I do not need my degree to be recognised. My aim was and is to learn, and if possible to disseminate what I have learnt to people with ears here in Greece.” (Greek, male, MA in Ed). (IQ)

However, for graduates seeking work in the state sector, recognition by the Government is of paramount importance and there were some expressions of resentment at the perceived lack of action by the Open University to influence this situation:

“The OU does not care if other member states of EU do not recognise their degrees. They think it is not their business, or if you like, their responsibility” (Greek, MA in Ed). (IQ)

Only four out of the twelve interviewees had heard about the Bologna Agreement, of whom two were working for the European Commission in

Belgium, and there were mixed opinions about the status attached to having a degree from the Open University. The Spanish and Greek nationals felt that being a graduate from the Open University made no difference to their CV, other than as proof of competence in the English language. In Belgium, among international organisations, an OU degree is treated in exactly the same ways as a degree from any other European university. In some cases, graduates had experienced a distrust about degrees taught by distance learning and have had to learn how to respond:

"I work with a lot of American clients and in the States there are so many so-called correspondence universities where you are actually buying your degree which makes it worthless. Now I no longer say I obtained my degree by correspondence. I just say it was from a British university and that I gained a first class degree. People from the US seem to be impressed by this." (German, female, living in Belgium, BSc). (IQ)

The Spanish and Belgian MBA graduates felt that an MBA from the Open University had more international applicability than, for example, an MBA from a Spanish or Belgian university. However a British MBA graduate living in Spain, felt that the OU brand was not well recognised in Spain and that the fact that the University prides itself on its openness and accessibility could be seen in a pejorative light:

"You can say that you have an MBA from the Open University, but it sounds as if you have been giving them away for free! In a way that diminishes the importance of it, just by the mere name." (IQ)

Three graduates expressed the opinion that Bachelors degrees are not easily understood by other countries, and that recognition is easier at Masters level. One felt that the only truly portable qualification is a Doctorate, a term that is understood in all countries and by all employers:

"The Bologna Agreement will be useful because generally speaking I think Bachelors and Masters degrees are really only understood in the Anglo-Saxon world, and I am not sure how they are interpreted abroad. Ultimately, if you want to travel around, you have to go up to such a high level that your qualifications are recognised ... if you have a PhD then that is instantly recognised." (British MBA graduate living in Spain). (IQ)

Conclusion

The data obtained from the interviews gave me not only additional information with which to address Research Questions 3 & 4 (1.18), but also served to personalise and illuminate issues that I had previously been investigating from a distance, via the survey. The different attitudes towards distance learning and OU qualifications experienced by graduates in Belgium, Greece and Spain, although visible in the statistics arising from the data collected in the questionnaire, became more vivid when expressed in person during the telephone interviews. It became easier to appreciate both the linguistic competence and the international outlook of many of the graduates and to understand the role that the OU has played in their life. Their enthusiasm for the teaching and learning methods employed by the University was tempered only, in some cases, by frustration at the lack of official recognition by employers and government representatives.

Their descriptions of previous experiences of higher education in their own countries, although not directly comparable to that provided by the OU, gave an insight into the nature of the higher education system in Belgium, Greece and Spain. The OU's use of interactive learning styles, individual tutorial support and the accessibility and high quality of the teaching materials all received favourable comment. The assessment strategies employed by the OU, although in some cases perceived as more demanding in terms of the quantity of assignments required, were also seen as being more transparent. Despite examples of Anglocentricity in the course materials, this was accepted as an inevitable factor when studying with a British university. There was no

discernible difference between the opinions expressed by home nationals in Belgium, Greece and Spain and the expatriate community; they were all equally positive about their experiences of learning with the OU.

There was considerably more variation in the responses to the question about feelings of national and cultural identity, and it was here that the differences between home nationals and British nationals living abroad were most discernible. Unfortunately the sample of graduates interviewed only included three British nationals, two living in Spain and one in Greece, and therefore it is impossible to generalise about the attitudes of British expatriates living in mainland Europe. However, there was an interesting division between the Greek and Spanish nationals who confessed to strong Anglophile tendencies, and the more international community of graduates living in Belgium who chose to study with the Open University mainly because of the flexibility of its delivery and the fact that its courses were in English, rather than through any particular admiration for British culture or the British education system. Further subdivisions were visible between graduates with an MBA, whose motivation was purely to gain an internationally recognised qualification of direct relevance to their work, and graduates with a Bachelors degree whose reasons for studying were much more diverse. Regardless of motivation or the qualifications gained, the experience of studying in a transnational context was not seen as being a principal factor in changing perceptions of national identity. Language, as identified by Grant (1997), was still seen as being an important marker along with nationality of parents and partners and length of residence in a country. Nevertheless, for those Anglophiles amongst the group, the process of studying for a degree with the Open University had served to reinforce their pro-British tendencies.

With all the data from the focus group, the questionnaire and the interviews collected and analysed, I now move into the final chapter of this thesis where I draw together the themes that have been running through this study in order to provide a representation of this transnational academic community.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this final chapter I begin by pulling together the data gathered from the focus group, the questionnaire and the interviews in order to summarise what has been established about the graduates surveyed and their experiences of learning in a borderless environment. This is related to the context as described in Chapter Two and the wider themes identified in the literature review in Chapter Three. Starting with a portrait of this transnational community, I look at their experiences of learning and their need for professional endorsement, and complete my analysis by arguing that these graduates are themselves a factor in "*the intensification of global interconnectedness*" (Field, 1995) as both victors and victims of globalising trends in higher education. In conclusion, and continuing with the viewpoint of the reflective practitioner, I look backwards over this study in order to review its focus and design, and to outline the implications of its findings for practice. I finish with plans for its dissemination.

A portrait of a transnational graduate community

One of the most striking aspects of this community lies in its multinational composition. From the data collected in the questionnaires we know that despite the fact that just over one third of the sample (37%) are of British nationality (5:95), there is still a wide range of nationalities among the group, in particular amongst the graduates resident in Belgium. Born in 19 different countries, the cultural diversity in this sample is made more pronounced when set in the context of their previous educational experiences in a total of 32 different countries. Not surprisingly, this is also a multilingual community, accustomed to speaking two or more languages and with a high level of usage of the English language (5:98). Half the participants had attended school for some period of time in an English-speaking environment. Coulby & Jones (1996) refer to most Europeans as having "plural identities" and argue that this is the reality for the majority, despite the desire of many

individual European states and their education systems to deny this. *"Increasing cultural complexity might be daunting, but it cannot be avoided"* (Coulby & Jones, 1996:36). Recognition of a sense of plural or transformative identity (Hawisher & Selfe, 2000) is evident from responses to questions in the interviews about national identity. As highlighted by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), modern societies are subject to constant and rapid change, and therefore identity becomes increasingly fragmented. Country of birth is no longer the principal marker of identity (Grant, 1997) among this community, and there is evidence of cultural hybridity (Hall, 1992), which has arisen as a result of a number of factors including geographical mobility, multiple citizenship, cross-national marriage and bi or multilingualism. There is confirmation here of the intrinsic complexity of the concept of identity which manifests itself in an ever-changing fashion, dependent upon the relationships and circumstances in which these graduates find themselves. Conversely, there are also signs of a new homogeneity, which for want of a better term could be labelled "Western European"(5:129) Among the British expatriate community, however, perceptions of national identity appear to be more fixed and unified, and even extended residence in another European country does not seem to alter their sense of being British (5:128). These differences could be explained by the connotation of the term "European" (Chimisso, 2003) which may mean very different things to a Spaniard, a Greek, a Belgian and a Briton, and which will depend upon their definition of the "other", the group to which they do not belong:

"I have lived in Spain since 1989 and speak fluent Spanish but still think of myself as a Scot." (Scottish female, MBA, living in Spain) (IQ)

"I think I feel more European than German. I left Germany 13 years ago and have worked in Luxembourg for six years and am now living in Brussels with my boyfriend who is French." (German, female, BSc) (IQ)

"Europe is just a name in Brussels. An everyday reality"
(Belgian, female, BSc) (IQ)

The second most striking aspect of this community is the level of previous educational attainment, in comparison with OU graduates resident in the UK. Data from the questionnaire confirmed the fact that almost half the sample had a first-cycle degree before entering the Open University, which indicates the high level of demand for continuing personal and professional development, and is symptomatic of the needs of students attracted to 'borderless education' (Mason, 1998). Already competent learners in their own language and with proven academic success within another educational system, many of these graduates were discerning consumers, looking for individualised, flexible learning opportunities. They were attracted to the Open University because of its delivery methods, because it offered courses in the English Language and because of its curriculum (5:108). Many commented on the lack of opportunities for part-time tertiary education locally, particularly in Greece and Belgium (5:108). With only 5% of those surveyed falling in the 20-29 age range (and only 3% in Spain) it is clear that the Open University is not replacing traditional higher education provision for young students wanting first-cycle degrees. In CE it is offering an opportunity for mature students to study something relevant to their work, to allow them to change career direction, to follow up a particular interest, to improve their employment status or to make up for missed opportunities. Among the British expatriate group the fact that its courses are offered in English, and would lead to a qualification that was recognised within the UK was a major attraction. Among the Greek nationals, especially those with high levels of proficiency in the English language, the prime motivation was

to obtain further professional development in an English-speaking medium. For nationals of Belgium and Spain, the reasons given for choosing to study with the OU were more varied (5:108) but were more likely to be related to the curriculum and the flexibility of delivery:

"I needed a degree for personal and professional reasons. I was working full-time and tried to join a programme in a Belgian university but it proved so difficult – they were very inflexible"
(Belgian, male, BA) (IQ)

An attempt at classifying this community according to nationality and employment status, (using data from both the questionnaire and the interviews) produces three groupings. The largest group, accounting for just over one third of the total sample, are British expatriates (Appendix 6) who are living in Belgium, Greece or Spain as primary workers or in supporting roles. In Greece and Spain they are mostly, but not exclusively engaged in teaching English as a second language and a small percentage are retired, whereas in Belgium they are more likely to be employed, or a partner of someone employed by either the European Commission or other international agencies. These employment patterns reflect the more limited professional opportunities for non-native graduates in Greece and Spain (1:16). Among the expatriate community in these two countries there are also individual examples of people whose primary purpose for living there is not related to employment but rather the attraction of the Southern European lifestyle, and for this group the Open University has provided an opportunity for personal rather than professional development.

The second largest group are the Anglophiles, the majority of whom have had previous educational or residential experiences in the UK or other English-speaking countries, and are discernible in the interview transcripts, by their enthusiastic and at times evangelical response to British education and culture:

"My latent Britishness was the main drive behind my decision to study with the OU. I am attracted by meritocracy and open-mindedness and thus I got the opportunity to feel a member of British society through studying at a British university" (Greek, male, MA in Ed). (IQ)

"I am an Anglophile. I'm not saying that to flatter anyone, just because people in Western Europe either like the UK or they don't. England is special, it has a special culture." (Spanish, male, MBA) (IQ)

From the sample of graduates who were interviewed, this Anglophilia was more marked among the Greek nationals, than the Spaniards or Belgians, but the sample was too small to generalise along these lines. Some of the Anglophile community were studying for reasons of professional development and specifically wanted to learn, for example, about British theories of educational management, whereas others were studying purely for personal development in order to learn more about aspects of British cultural life.

The third and smallest grouping could be categorized as Anglophone "knowledge workers" (Castells, 1996), non-British professionals needing an internationally recognised qualification to help them progress in their career, and who were most clearly evident among the MBA contingent. Their reasons for studying with the OU were solely work-related, and they tended to have a more pragmatic approach to their studies:

"The Open University wasn't my choice, but I am not unhappy with the choice, it was chosen by my company, IBM." (Belgian, male, MBA). (IQ)

These groupings are analogous to those identified by Tait (1994) in his original categorisation of OU students resident in CE (2:22).

Whatever their stated reasons for choosing to study with the Open University, it becomes apparent that the University fulfils a different function for students living in CE than for students living in the UK. Its openness and accessibility, its lack of entry requirements, its efforts to appeal to non-traditional learners, its philosophy of egalitarianism, all the aspects of the Open University which make it unique within the UK, are largely irrelevant for the majority of its students living in CE. High fee levels and lack of financial assistance for those on low incomes mean that the University is only an option for the more financially secure. There is no extra support for non-native speakers of English and no concession in its assessment strategies. Even the Openings programme, consisting of short, taster courses designed specifically for the less confident learner, is not made available to students resident outside the UK. Students are expected to cope with a degree of Anglocentricity in some of the course materials, and with Anglo-Saxon academic conventions, which, as identified by the graduates in the interviews (5:131) can be very different from pedagogical traditions in other Western European countries. Nevertheless, the Open University is clearly filling a gap in the educational market in these three countries, thereby conforming to one of the primary roles of transnational providers, as identified in the survey commissioned by the CEURC (CEUR, 2002) (3:11).

Learning in a transnational context

When they embarked on their studies with the OU, the participants in this survey were expected to adapt not only to British academic conventions, but also to a different pedagogical approach, described by the OU as “supported distance learning”. It was difficult, therefore, to make straight comparisons between their experiences of learning in their home environment and learning with the OU. Like the students in Goodfellow’s research (2001), the graduates

in this survey had had some problems in getting accustomed to the OU's policies on assignment writing and word limits:

"I remember in my first year trying to accustom myself to the assignment method. One of the first things is to learn how to follow the schedule and respect timetables ...and then probably to answer what you have been asked" (Spanish, male, MBA). (IQ)

They had also had to learn how to write more concisely, and, in some cases, to become familiar with a more interactive style of teaching and learning and an inductive rather than a deductive approach to intellectual reasoning. Yet despite these differences, the majority expressed appreciation of the high quality of the learning materials, the pragmatic stance adopted in particular in both the MBA and the MA in Education programmes, the encouragement to become an autonomous learner and the nature of the tutorial support provided by the OU. There was an assumption on behalf of the graduates that they would expect to find a degree of Anglocentricity in the course materials, and indeed this was regarded as a positive dimension for those wanting to learn about British culture (5:135). The only negative comments came from two non-British MBA graduates who felt that the case studies used in the programme could have been more international.

Although it would appear from the evidence in this study that the Open University's methods of teaching and learning can be fairly easily transported into other cultures, it is important to remember the composition of the survey. As emphasised earlier, these graduates were successful practitioners of transnational education. They were accustomed to the art of "cultural translation" (Coulby & Jones, 1996), of negotiating meanings, of mediating between different cultures, languages and societies. As we have already seen, this was a multilingual, multicultural group with multiple identities. They were practised in "*engaging with global entities*" (Bartlett, 1997) and had no compulsion about "*slipping the bonds of national allegiances*" (Brah, 1996) in

order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by 'borderless education'. Indeed, they frequently showed frustration at the lack of flexible learning opportunities within their own countries, blaming this on the intransigence of national governments. These graduates were happy to take advantage of globalising trends in higher education and to embrace a Western imperialism in the curriculum (Robertson, 1992). This is not to suggest that they have forgotten or discarded the cultural traditions of their native country, but rather that they have adopted new forms of "diasporan identity" (Brah, 1996) by drawing on more than one cultural repertoire. As such these graduates are survivors of the globalising process, but we must remember that a very different picture may have emerged if a similar study had been made of Open University students who did not complete the course, who dropped out of the system or for whom the demands of learning in a different cultural context became too difficult to overcome.

Professional endorsement of transnational education

For the graduates in this study, the issue of professional endorsement of their OU degree posed far greater problems than the need to adapt to different pedagogical practices. The majority of graduates who had completed an Open University degree with the purpose of professional development, were anxious that their studies should be recognised, either by their current employer, future employers, professional bodies or by government. Their need was to be able to apply their newly acquired knowledge to their workplace in order to ensure career enhancement or even career change. In some cases a degree was vital to their career progression and the Open University provided the only viable option:

"I needed to obtain a degree as soon as possible for professional reasons. As an administrator in the European Parliament I had already passed the competition to become an "A" grade and was performing typical "A" grade duties, but I couldn't be promoted without a degree... I tried to enrol in a Belgian university but it

proved difficult, so I joined the Open University” (Belgian, male, BA) (IQ)

Unfortunately for some of these graduates, they were also to experience some of the disadvantages of having gained a qualification from a transnational provider. As identified by members of the focus group at the beginning of this research, a combination of factors including the difference in length between first-cycle degrees in the UK and other European countries, a mistrust or lack of understanding of distance learning, and a protectionist stance towards transnational education have all combined to make recognition of OU degrees an issue of some concern. Whilst it is true that the situation is different in every country, there is clearly some commonality between the experiences of graduates in Belgium, Greece and Spain. In most cases recognition by employers in the private sector does not pose too many problems (5:118) although smaller employers cannot be expected to have heard of the Open University nor to understand the nature of supported distance learning. Recognition by educational institutions can be more difficult and time-consuming, often requiring graduates to provide detailed information (in translation) about the content and level of their degree and the quality and quantity of study undertaken (5:118). The greatest problem lies with recognition by the State (5:118). This is a particular issue for the large number of graduates who wish to be employed in the public sector, for example those wishing to teach, and it appears to be an insurmountable problem in Greece. This situation exemplifies one of the tensions brought about by the emerging market for borderless education, as identified by Van Damme (2002).

Victors or victims?

The graduates in this study are characteristic of the type of students who succeed in a “risk society” (Beck, 1992). They are already competent learners, they are multilingual but most importantly are proficient in the English language, many have experience of living and being educated in more than one country which means that they have no particular affinity to any one

country, although many are clearly attracted to British or Western culture. They are people for whom the whole of Europe is a natural area of activity, and they are turning to transnational education because of the lack of appropriate provision in their current country of residence, because of the wider curriculum offered, or because they need a qualification in the English language. In this sense, I would argue that these graduates are encouraging the processes of globalisation. Their quest for the latest knowledge to help with their professional development is assisting organisations to become more competitive in the global marketplace:

“We have to keep on learning all of our lives, otherwise we will be left behind. We can’t take time off” (Belgian, female, BSc) (IQ).

Their search for flexible learning opportunities that will allow them to combine work and study, and their willingness to use new methods of learning facilitated by ICT, shows that they are sufficiently skilled and confident to take advantage of innovative forms of distance education. As a new breed of international students-as-consumers (Edwards, 1995), the participants in this survey are proof that education can be “uncoupled” (Kenway, 1996) from its national base, that the world has become “compressed in time and space” (Harvey, 1989), that distance learning is constructing a “deterritorialisation” of place (Edwards & Usher, 2000), and that pedagogy is no longer confined to a particular classroom, institution or nation-state. These graduates are therefore paradigmatic of the forces of globalisation within higher education, both responding and contributing to it (Edwards, 1995).

The “paradoxical consequences” of globalisation (Featherstone, 1992) are also visible in this community. There may be evidence of cultural diversification among the members of the community, but there is also evidence of cultural standardisation (Hallak, 2000). These graduates have all experienced distance teaching according to British educational theories. They have studied

literature, music, history, sociology or management from a British point of view and in the English language, but whilst living in Athens, Antwerp or Alicante. As head teachers, senior managers in industry and commerce and administrative staff in the EU, some of these graduates are in influential roles and in a position to disseminate their knowledge to new generations of Europeans, thus perpetuating the processes of cultural homogenisation. The divisions in society or “social schizophrenia” (Hallak, 2000) will grow wider as those who are on the “periphery” of society (Castells, 1996), those who do not speak English, those with low incomes, without work, without access to information technology, will become increasingly marginalised and “at risk” (Beck, 2002), as they find themselves unable to take advantage of the opportunities presented by ‘borderless education.’

However, even those who have been in a position to experience the more positive aspects of the impact of globalisation on higher education have also had to experience some of the pitfalls. Despite the rhetoric of policy-makers and “eurocrats”, there is little sign so far of an improved transparency of higher education systems, of greater opportunity for mobility within countries and of increased recognition of degrees within the European Union as promised in the Bologna Declaration (2:25). When they have tried to seek official recognition of their OU qualifications, these graduates have frequently become victims of the tensions between the local and the global, as portrayed by the intractability of nation-states in the face of the perceived threat posed by transnational providers. This may be diagnosed as a “crisis of rationality” (Usher & Edwards, 1994) by those who already feel part of a wider global society, but for those who are anxious to defend their national, cultural and educational traditions, the actions of globalising forces are seen as a fundamental attack on their powers to govern, and on their rights to educate their future citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the original theoretical framework for this study, which I outlined in the introduction to Chapter 3 (3:34). I

positioned the OU graduate in the centre of three concentric circles, with the second circle representing the EHEA and the outer circle representing the wider global picture. The purpose behind this framework was to provide help in conceptualising the different forces or tensions that were influencing the graduates' experience of transnational education. After gathering information about their biographies, and listening to their stories, I have learnt that not only have these forces affected them in both positive and negative ways, but they themselves, albeit unwittingly, have become a part of the globalising process which is changing the nature of higher education as we know it. As graduates they are all undoubtedly victors of the system, and for those who were learning purely for reasons of personal fulfilment, they remain victors and hopefully may be inspired to continue learning. However, for those who were studying specifically for reasons of professional development and who needed the recognition of their nation-state, there remain problems of recognition that have yet to be resolved. In this sense, the graduates in this study are one step ahead of the bureaucracy that surrounds the Bologna process and the move towards a European Higher Education Area and are driving forward the process of change.

Reflections on the research process

My reflections on this research will concentrate on three areas: the focus of the research, the research methods and the emergence of further questions.

The research focus

I realised early on in this study that I had chosen a very broad subject, and there have been times during the past three years when I have wished that I had focused my attention on a more discrete area of interest. Within the remit of exploring experiences of transnational learning, there are a number of different topics, each one worthy of more in-depth study: cultural differences in approaches to teaching and learning, the academic implications of studying in a second language, the internationalisation of the curriculum, and many others. However, these topics are probably more appropriately explored by experienced teachers or academics in the field. My choice of subject matter has arisen directly out of my work as a student adviser, and therefore it was important for me that the content of my research should provide as far as possible an holistic picture of the concerns of the students and graduates that I talk to every day. My specialism in careers advice gives me a particular perspective on the outcomes of the higher education process, and an interest in the values attributed to gaining a degree by both graduates and employers. The scope of this research is therefore a reflection of the range of issues that I meet on a regular basis when supporting students living in CE.

The research design

I deliberated at some length about the type of information that I wanted to obtain and the most appropriate methods to employ. I looked at the possibility of doing a purely qualitative study involving a greater number of interviews, and also considered the implications of carrying out a purely quantitative study by sending a questionnaire to graduates in all CE countries who graduated in one specific year. However, I eventually decided to use a multiple research strategy in the belief that this would provide a multiple

construction of the reality of learning in a transnational setting. The focus group gave an opportunity to hear the views of the European co-ordinators as key staff in the support of OU students, the questionnaire provided numerical data about a large sample of graduates, and the interviews allowed for the expression of feelings and perceptions which added colour and richness to the research. The reasons behind my choice of Belgium, Greece and Spain have been spelt out in detail in Chapter One. By choosing three very different countries I hoped to demonstrate the cultural diversity among the participants in the research, which had implications for the ways in which they experienced OU study. Although I realise that the composition of OU graduates in other CE countries may be slightly different, that there may be larger or smaller proportions of expatriates for example, and that the issues concerning recognition may differ to some extent in each country, I am confident that the concerns raised by the graduates in this study will be very similar to those from other countries. I am also unconvinced that had I chosen a larger sample of graduates from a greater number of countries, that I would have found anything significantly new or different. Hopefully my research methods are robust enough to be used by other researchers in other countries to similar effect. Above all, I hope this research is both plausible and credible, and that by recounting the stories of the graduates concerned, I have added a new and timely dimension to our understanding of transnational education. As I finish this thesis, I read about the Open University's plans to start offering its courses in Africa and China (OU, 2004).

Further questions

This study has concentrated on only a small number of issues concerning transnational learning, and has given priority to the voice of graduates who are successful exponents of the system. Further studies which give the viewpoint of students who have not been successful, could be more instructive for academics involved in writing course materials for an international audience, and for tutors involved in teaching in this context. Indeed, the voice of the tutors themselves needs to be heard, and their

expertise in supporting students from different academic cultures should be shared among course teams and managers.

The specific focus of this study on graduates, as opposed to students, could also provide an opportunity for the OU to gather feedback on other issues, for example: suggestions for curriculum development, the demand for postgraduate provision and levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and student support. Collecting the views of recent 'consumers' is common practice in marketing analyses but could be applied more frequently to the world of higher education.

Relevance for practice

As the demand for transnational education continues to grow, and universities persevere in their search for new markets on an international scale, the cultural and social impact of global education will take on a greater significance. The lessons learnt from this study about the need for a better understanding of both the cultural diversity of the student body and their motivation for learning, should therefore be of relevance not only to the Open University as it begins to accept applications from the new accession countries in the EU and contemplates extending its provision into new continents, but also to other UK universities offering trans-border education. The dangers of imposing Western values and traditions in a multicultural arena have been well documented by practitioners in the field (Mason, 1998; Gayol, 1996; Evans, 1995) but it is less common to hear the opinions of the recipients. It could be argued that those who show a conscience about the imposition of Western cultural imperialism are equally guilty of "cultural colonisation" (Usher & Edwards, 2000) by prescribing what is best for people elsewhere. In relation specifically to the OU, the experiences of the graduates in this study demonstrate that the university's approaches to teaching and learning transfer well across international and virtual boundaries, but more transparency and clarification of what is expected of students and why is still required, especially in the planning and writing of assignments. It is also

important to have effective student support strategies in place that are designed to counteract geographical and cultural distance. Part of this support strategy should be a willingness on behalf of the Open University to establish good relationships with the relevant educational and professional bodies in the countries in which it is operating, with a view to minimising potential difficulties and ensuring the best interests of students and graduates.

This study has also identified a lack of clarity about the responsibility of the Open University towards its students once they have graduated. At present, there is no regular follow-up of graduates, other than a standard student satisfaction questionnaire which is sent out to every student upon completion of a course. For graduates in CE seeking professional recognition, the onus is left to the individual to argue their case with the relevant authorities. If the University wants to continue with its mission to bring high quality distance learning to students across the globe, it is important in terms of both its reputation and student satisfaction, that it takes more responsibility for the professional development of its graduates.

My specific recommendations for the Open University include:

- Employing critical readers for all new course materials from non-British backgrounds.
- Ensuring that where appropriate, international case studies are used to illustrate examples in course materials.
- Using clear, unambiguous language in course materials, which, as far as possible, should be free of cultural bias.
- Continuing to develop a pedagogical approach based on empirical research into the most effective methods of teaching across geographical and virtual borders, and spelling out the reasons for this approach to students so that they are made aware of what is expected of them and why.

- Raising awareness amongst tutors of differences in academic cultural traditions, particularly when expecting students to participate in online and face-to-face tutorial discussions.
- Raising awareness among advisory staff of the current position concerning recognition of OU degrees
- Undertaking more research with groups of students from non-UK backgrounds (including those who drop out of the university), in order to benefit from their experiences of intercultural learning.
- Introducing a series of staff development activities across the university with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of adopting good international educational practice.
- Instigating an annual survey of graduates living in CE inviting feedback on any difficulties experienced in gaining recognition of their degree
- Compiling a dossier of cases studies where graduates have not had their degree recognised, and using this information to lobby the appropriate authorities
- Keeping all CE students and tutors informed of developments in the Bologna process

Plans for dissemination

I am hoping to disseminate the findings from this research both internally within the Open University and externally. Starting in the North Region amongst colleagues mostly closely involved with students in CE, I will have the opportunity to give presentations at a Regional Staff Meeting; a monthly meeting of all academic and academic-related staff in the region, and at a staff development event for student services staff. The European country co-ordinators visit Newcastle for an annual conference in April, and this would be an obvious opportunity to give feedback on my research and to thank them for their cooperation.

It is also important that the findings from this research reach Open University staff based in Milton Keynes, but this may have to be done in a variety of ways, given the size of the organisation. I will need to identify suitable networks in which to disseminate more broadly. I am currently a member of the National Careers Network, and have already suggested that I give a presentation at a future meeting. I am also a member of the Teaching and Learner Support Strategy Group, which could be an appropriate forum for discussing the issue of how we can best support our students in CE. I shall ensure that an executive summary is sent to the Director, Students and to other key personnel. There are two pan-University newspapers, one for staff and one for students, which may also be a useful means of reaching a wide cross-section of interested parties.

In terms of disseminating this research beyond the Open University, there are relevant networks such as EDEN (the European Distance Education Network) and CHERI (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information) which I will approach, and also several journals where I may be able to publish a paper e.g. Distance Education, Journal of Studies in International Education, International Journal of Lifelong Learning, HE in Europe and the European Journal of Education.

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Open University Graduate Questionnaire 2003

Personal and Professional Development in Continental Europe

You may include as much or as little information as you wish. All personal information will be regarded as confidential. Please tick as many boxes as appropriate unless instructed otherwise

Full name (in block capitals please).....

Personal Identifier

A. Nationality

The following questions concern your country of birth, your nationality and your current country of residence.

- 1. In which country were you born?
- 2. What is your nationality?
- 3. How long have you lived in your present country?
- 4. Have you ever lived in the UK? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please indicate for how many years:

5. If you were born in a country other than the one in which you are currently living, please give the reason(s) for your residence:

- work commitments ☐
- work commitments of spouse/partner ☐
- domestic commitments ☐
- personal preference ☐
- other (please specify) ☐

.....
.....

B. Language

The following questions concern your knowledge of the English language.

6. What do you regard as your main language, i.e. the language you use for everyday living?

7. Is English your 1st/2nd/3rd/4th language?
.....

8. When do you speak English?

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) at home? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) at work? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) in other situations | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you have answered “yes” to c) please give examples:
.....
.....

9.If English is not your first language, did this cause you any problems with your studies?

- Yes ☐ No ☐

If “yes”, please indicate, in order of priority, which of the following aspects posed the most problems, with “1” indicating the most problematic, and “5” indicating the least.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| • reading and understanding the course materials | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • expressing academic ideas in your own words | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • communicating with your tutor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • contributing to discussions during tutorials/residential schools | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • completing written work within time limits | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • other (<i>please specify</i>) | |

.....
.....
...
.....

C. Educational background

The following questions are about your previous education and the countries in which you were educated:

10. In which country or countries did you attend school?
.....
.....

11. At what age did you leave secondary school/enseignement
secondaire/gymnasion/lykeion/educacion secundaria?

15	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Before you started studying with the Open University what was your highest level of qualification?

- 'A' levels/Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Superieur/Apolytirio Lykeiou/Bachillerato (BUP) orequivalent ☐
- HND/Graduat/Ptychion TEI or equivalent ☐
- Honours degree/Kandidaat/Ptychion AEI/Licenciado or equivalent ☐
- Other (please specify) ☐
.....
.....

13. Did any of your education take place in the UK or another English speaking country or an English-speaking community e.g. international school?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

If 'Yes', please give details:
.....
.....
...

and for how many years:	0-1	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
	6+	<input type="checkbox"/>

D. Personal and professional development

These questions concern your reasons for choosing to study with the Open University and your subsequent personal and professional development.

14. What were your initial reasons for choosing to study with the Open University? (please tick as many boxes as appropriate but indicate order of priority, with "1" being the most important reason and "8" the least)

- Because it offered the opportunity to study by distance learning ☐
- Because its courses are in English ☐
- Because of its flexibility across national boundaries ☐
- Because I wanted to develop my interest in a particular subject ☐
- Because I wanted to change my career ☐
- Because there is no suitable alternative where I live ☐
- Because I wanted to gain a degree from a UK university ☐
- Because I wanted to make up for missed opportunities ☐
- Other
.....
.....

15. Do you feel that your degree from the Open University has helped you to develop yourself?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If "yes, in what ways? (tick as many boxes as appropriate, but indicate order of priority, with "1" being the most important and "8" being the least)

- By becoming more knowledgeable ☐
- By giving me the ability to think independently ☐
- By allowing me to evaluate facts more objectively ☐
- By widening my experience of life ☐
- By allowing me to see things in a different way ☐
- By giving me confidence to contribute to discussions and debate ☐
- By proving something to myself ☐
- By improving my skills in language and expression ☐
- Other
.....
.....
.....

16. Do you feel that your degree has helped you to develop professionally?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If “yes”,in what ways? (tick as many boxes as appropriate, but indicate order of priority with “1” being the most important and “7” being the least)

- By learning things relevant to my work ☐
- By improving my promotion prospects ☐
- By giving me the knowledge and skills to start a new career ☐
- By giving me a qualification which has helped me to find a better paid job ☐
- By improving my status at work ☐
- By gaining a qualification using the English language ☐
- By gaining a qualification from a UK university ☐
- Other ☐

.....
.....
.....
.....

17. If you feel that your degree has helped you to develop professionally, please give information about the type of work you were doing before you started your studies with the Open University, and the type of work you are doing now, using job name or title if appropriate:

Before I started my degree with the Open University:

.....
.....
.....

Now I have graduated:

.....
.....
.....

18. Have you had any difficulties in using your Open University degree to gain employment?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If “yes”, please give details:

.....
.....

19. Have you had any difficulties in gaining recognition of your Open University degree by:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) other educational institutions? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) the Government (e.g. Ministry of Education) | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) employers | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

If “yes”, please give
details:.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Please return, in the envelope provided, by **Friday 7 February, 2003**
If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Hilary Bennison
Student Services Manager
The Open University in the North
Eldon House, Regent Centre
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE3 3PW

Tel: +44 191 284 1611

Email: h.bennison@open.ac.uk

If you would be interested in being interviewed by telephone about your experiences of studying with the Open University, please indicate below and I will contact you in the near future. You can be assured that all data will be treated in confidence.

I am happy to be interviewed about my experiences of studying with the Open University.

Name Personal Identifier

Address (if different from address at head of covering letter)
.....
.....
.....

Email address:

Telephone: Day Evening

Appendix 2

Covering letter to accompany questionnaire

Dear

P.I.

Open University Graduate Questionnaire Personal and Career Development in Continental Europe

I am writing to ask for your assistance in completing the enclosed questionnaire, which is being sent to all Open University graduates living in Belgium, Greece and Spain who graduated in the years 2000 and 2001.

I am currently an Open University student on the Doctorate in Education programme and am researching into the experiences of Open University graduates who lived in Continental Europe while studying for their degree. The focus of my dissertation will be the learning experiences of graduates who studied in a cross-cultural setting and the impact of culture and identity upon personal and career development. I have chosen graduates living in Belgium, Greece and Spain as being representative of the diversity of cultural and educational backgrounds amongst the Open University graduate population.

I am being supported in this research by the Open University in the North, where I work as a student adviser. A letter from the Regional Director is enclosed.

Further research following on from this questionnaire will involve individual telephone interviews with a small number of graduates from each country. If you would be interested in being interviewed, please fill in the reply slip at the end of the questionnaire. All data collected will be treated as confidential.

I would be grateful if you could return the questionnaire, in the pre-paid envelope provided, by **Friday 7 February 2003**.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Hilary Bennison

Encs.

Appendix 3

Letter of support from Regional Director

9 October 2002

Ref: chb/jws/cegrads

Dear Graduate

Open University graduate questionnaire

As you may know, the Open University in the North has been registering and supporting students in Continental Europe for twenty years, and maintaining our support effectively means that we need to obtain accurate and relevant information about our students, their intentions, and the value they place upon their OU study and awards.

Hilary Bennison has long had an interest, as a student adviser, in the career implications of Open University study for those resident outside the UK. She is now engaged in formal research towards a Doctorate in Education, focussing on graduate destinations. Her findings will be of value to the University in understanding the needs of people who have studied in a cross-cultural context. The information and opinion you can give her, from your standpoint as a successful graduate student, will help to shape the Open University's knowledge of this particular academic community, its needs and its ambitions.

I do hope that you will take the time to supply as much information on the questionnaire as you can, and thank you for studying with the OU and for contributing to our ongoing commitment to research and evaluation.

Yours faithfully,

J.W. Shipley
Regional Director

Appendix 4

Coding frame for questionnaire – closed questions.

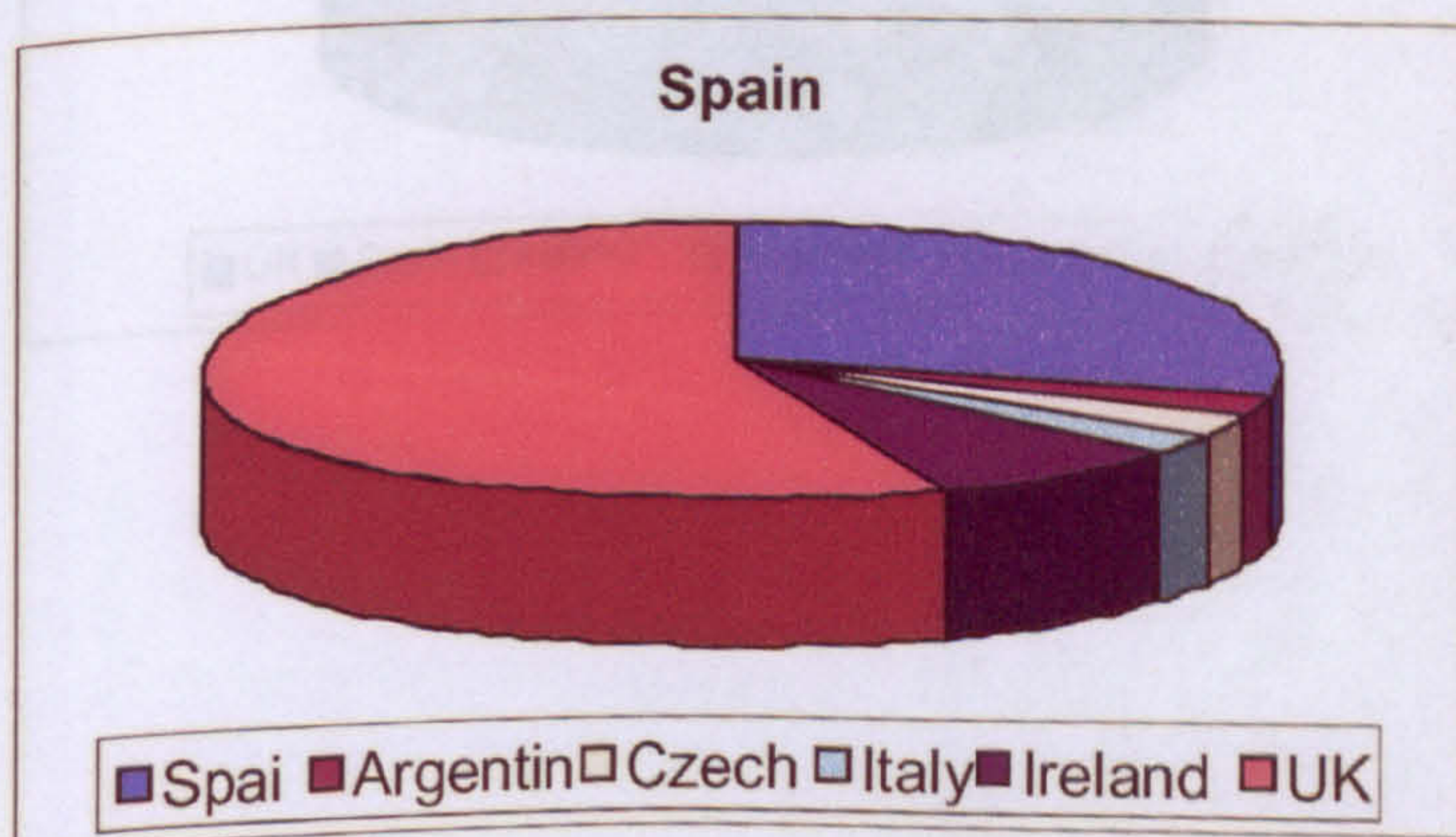
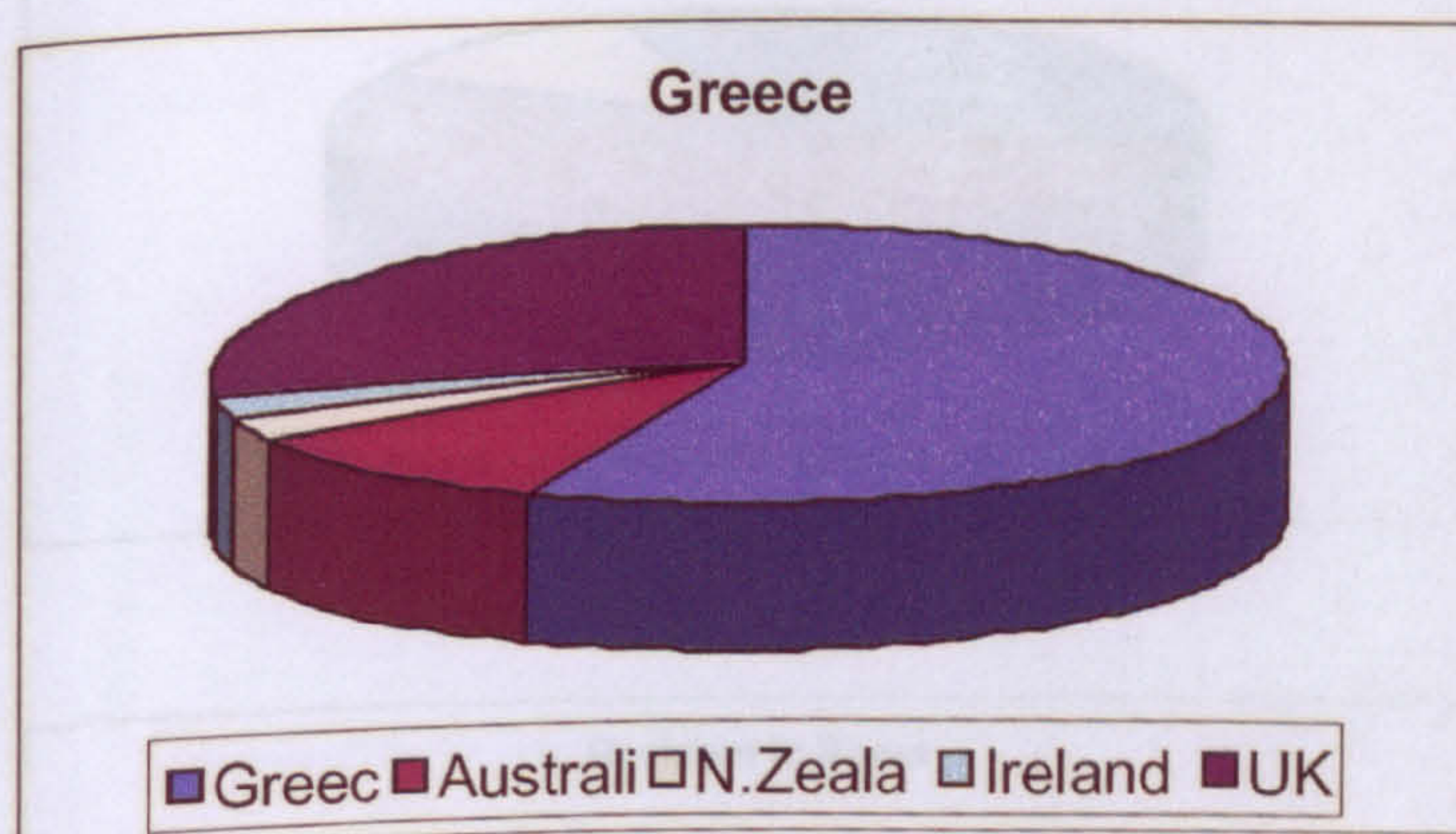
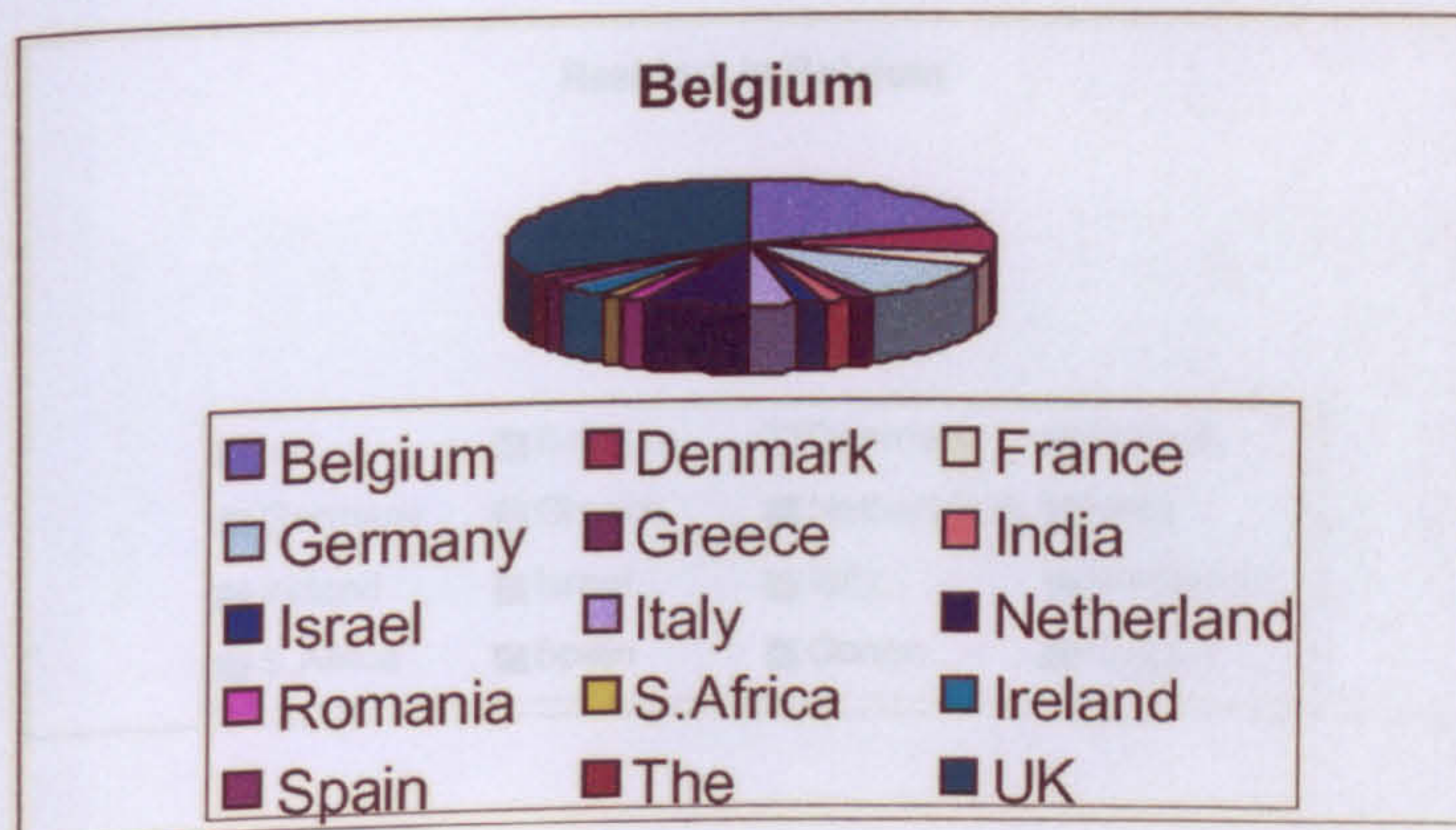
Column	Variables/codes
1.Country of birth	1.UK 2.Belgium 3.Greece 4.Spain 5.Other
2.Nationality	1.British 2.Belgian 3.Greek 4.Spanish 5.Other
3. Length of residence in present country	1.0-5 2.6-19 3.20-39 4.40+
4. Lived in UK?	1.Yes 2.No
5. How long?	1.0-5 2.6-9 3.20-39 4.40+
6.If not living in country of birth, why not?	1.work commitments 2.work commitments of spouse/partner 3.domestic commitments 4.personal preference 5.other
7.Main language	1.English 2.French 3.German 4.Dutch 5.Greek 6.Spanish 7.Other
8.Is English your 1 st /2 nd /3 rd /4 th language?	1.1 st 2.2 nd 3.3 rd 4.4 th
9.When do you speak English?	1.At home 2.At work 3.In other situations
10.If English not main language, any difficulties?	1.yes 2.no
11.If yes, what problems?	1.reading and understanding materials 2.expressing academic ideas 3.communication with tutor 4.contributing to discussions

	5.completing work on time 6.other
12.In which country did you attend school?	1.UK 2.Belgium 3.Greece 4.Spain 5.Other
13.At what age did you leave school?	1.15 2.16 3.17 4.18 5.19 6.Other
14.Highest level of qualification	1."A"levels 2.HND 3.Hons degree 4.Other
15.Educated in the UK?	1.yes 2.no
16.For how long?	1.0-1 yrs 2.2-5 3.6+
17.Reasons for studying with OU	1.Distance learning 2.Courses in English 3.Flexibility 4.Develop an interest 5.Change career 6.No suitable alternative 7.Degree from UK university 8.Missed opportunities 9.Other
18. Did degree help with personal development?	1.yes 2.no
19. How?	1.More knowledgeable 2.Independent thought 3.Evaluate facts 4.Widening experience 5.Seeing things differently 6.Confidence to contribute more 7.Proving something to self 8.Improving skills in language 9.Other
20.Did degree help with professional development?	1.yes 2.no
21.How?	1.Relevance to work 2.Improving promotion prospects 3.New knowledge and skills 4.Better paid job 5.Improving status at work 6.Qualification in English language

	7. Qualificaiton from UK university 8. Other
22. Difficulty in gaining employment?	1. yes 2. no
23. Difficulty in gaining recognition by educational institutions?	1. yes 2. no
24. Difficulty in gaining recognition by the Government?	1. yes 2. no
25. Difficulty in gaining recognition by employers?	1. yes 2. no
26. Prepared to be interviewed?	1. yes 2. no

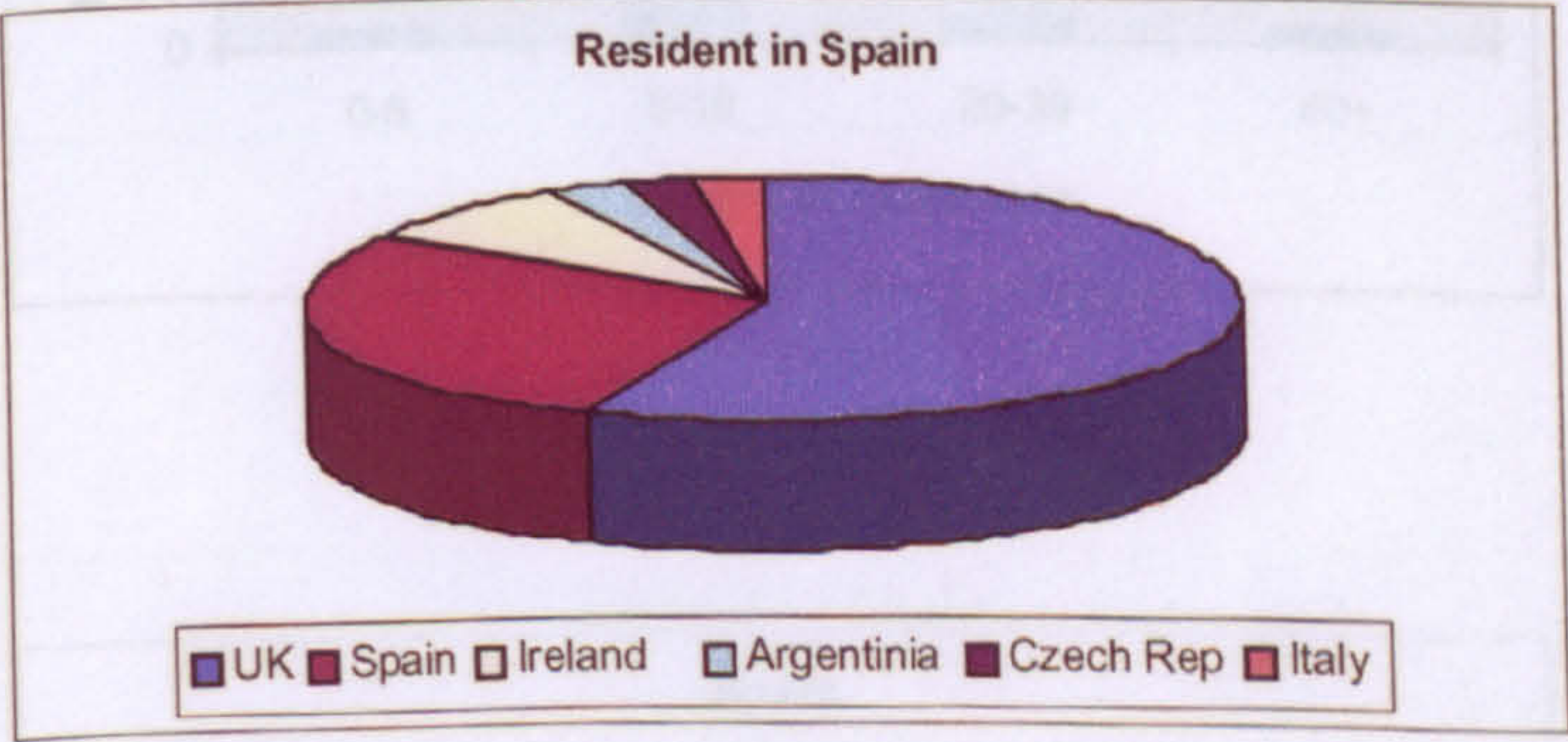
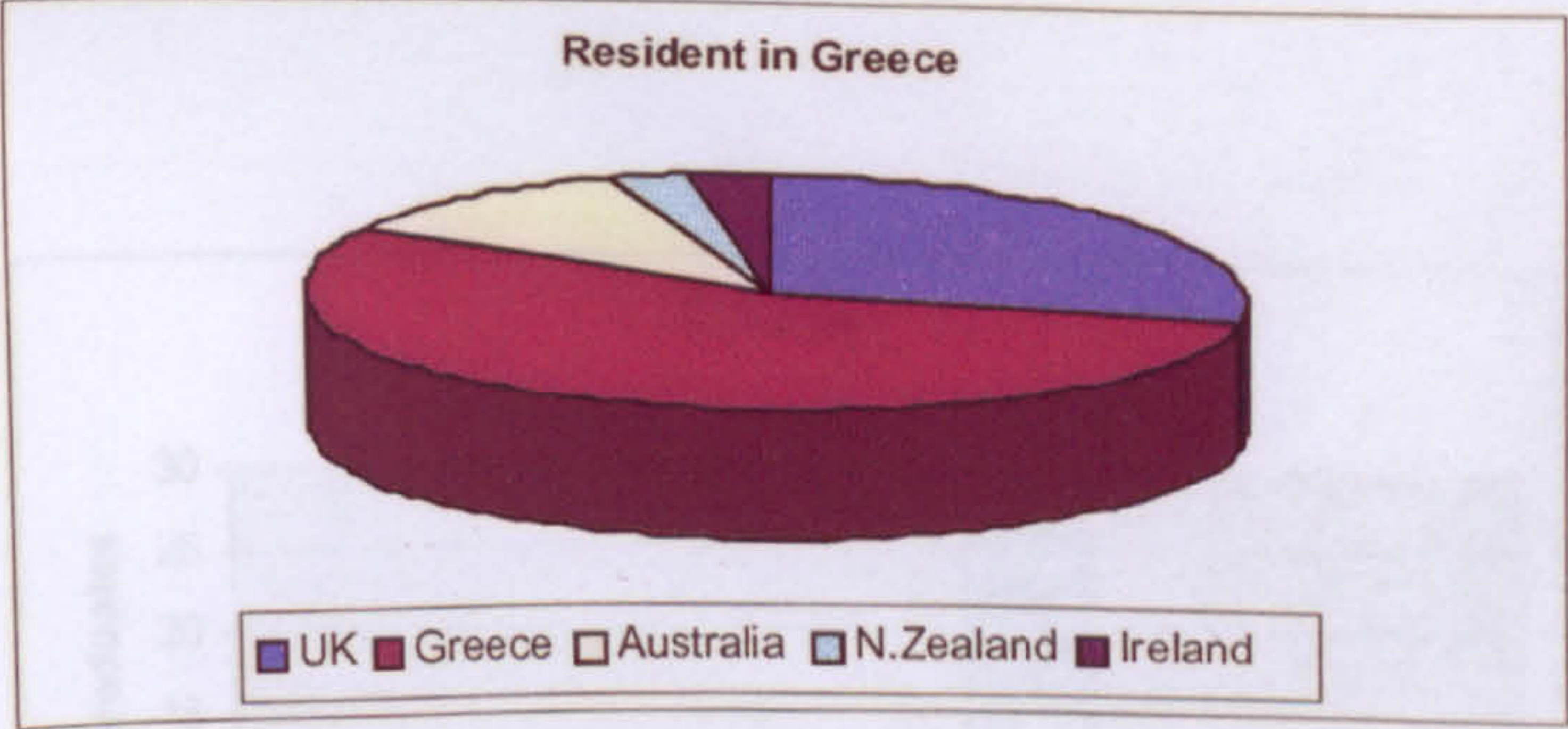
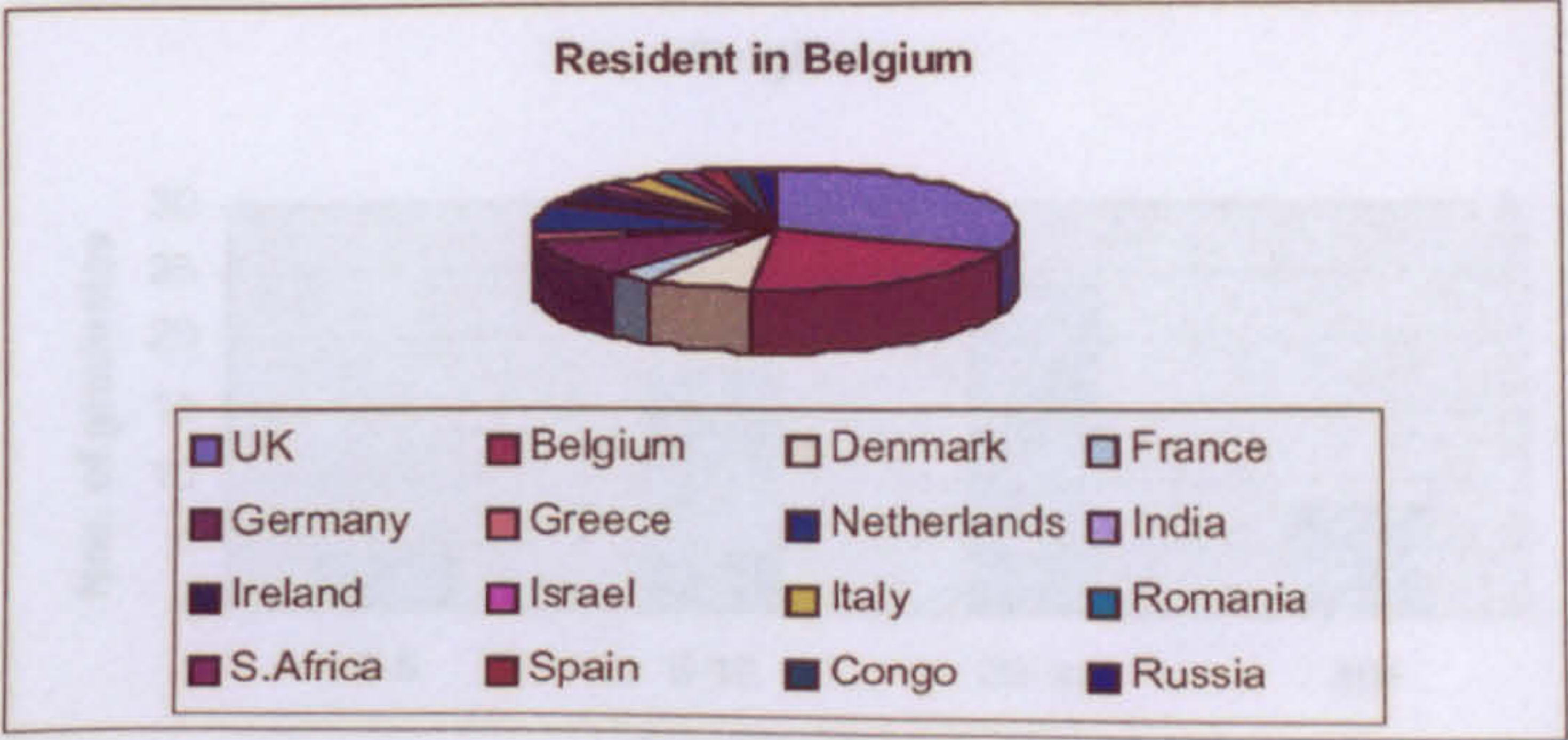
Appendix 5

Country of birth by country of residence



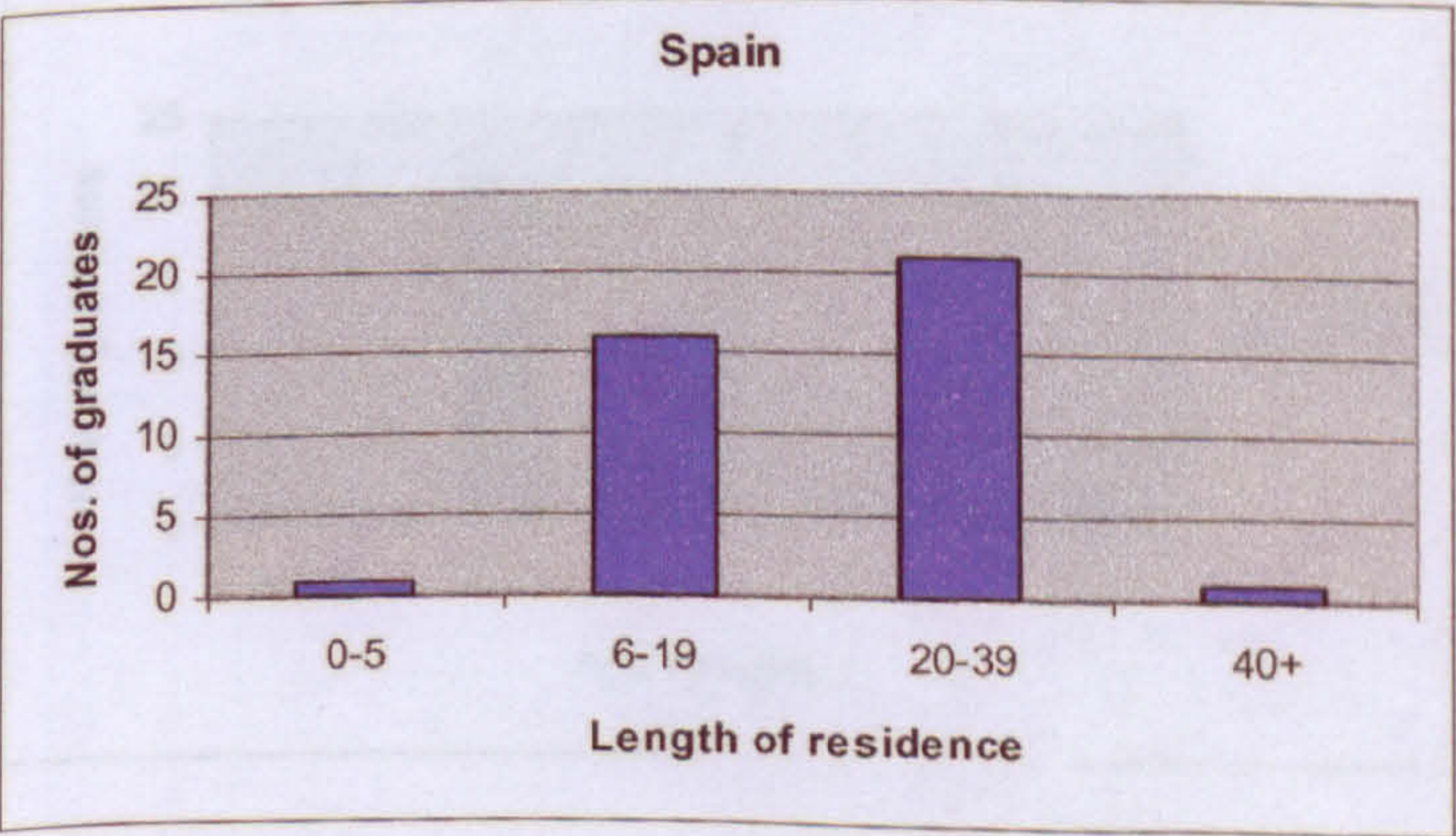
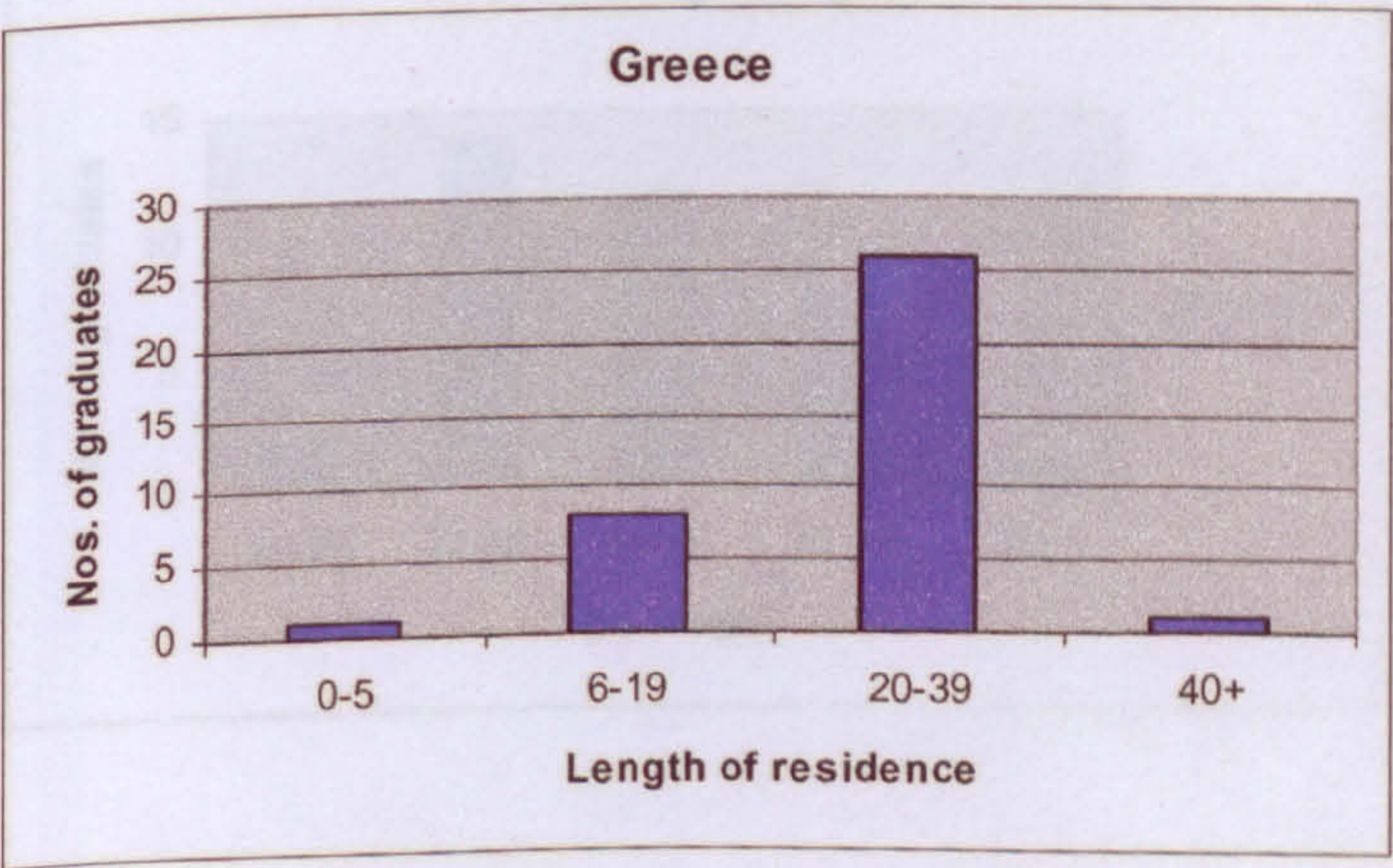
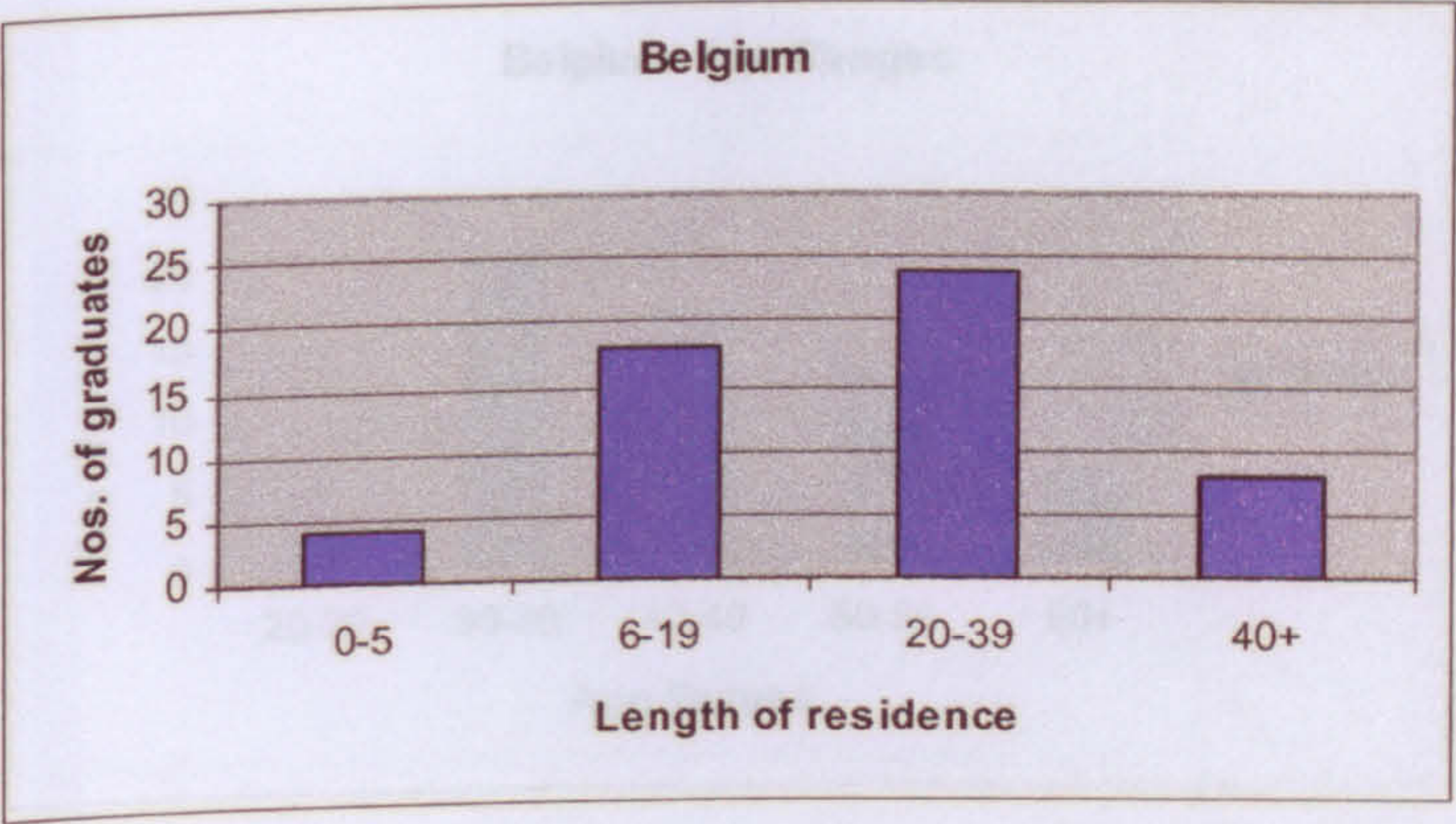
Appendix 6

Nationalities by country of residence



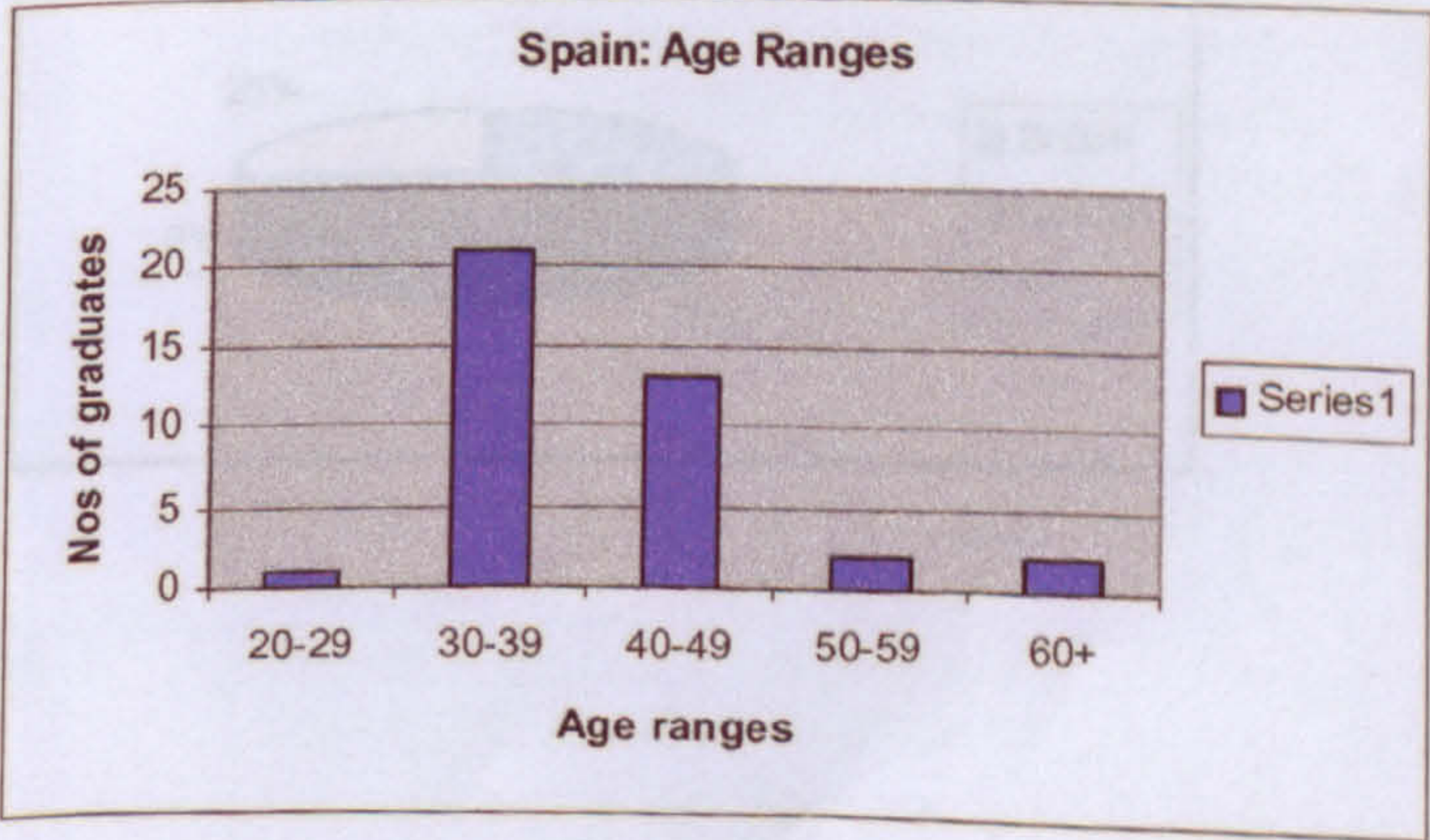
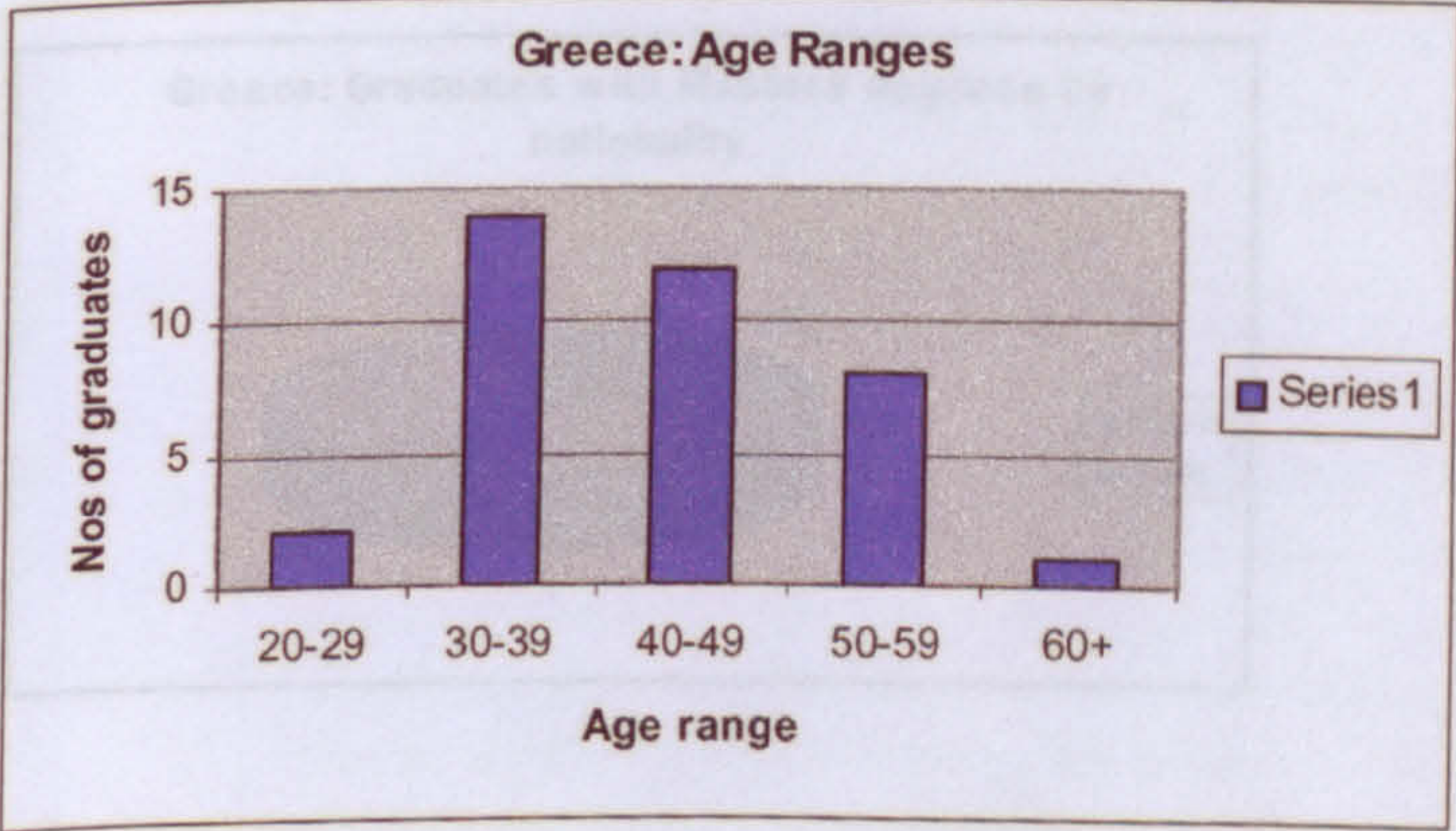
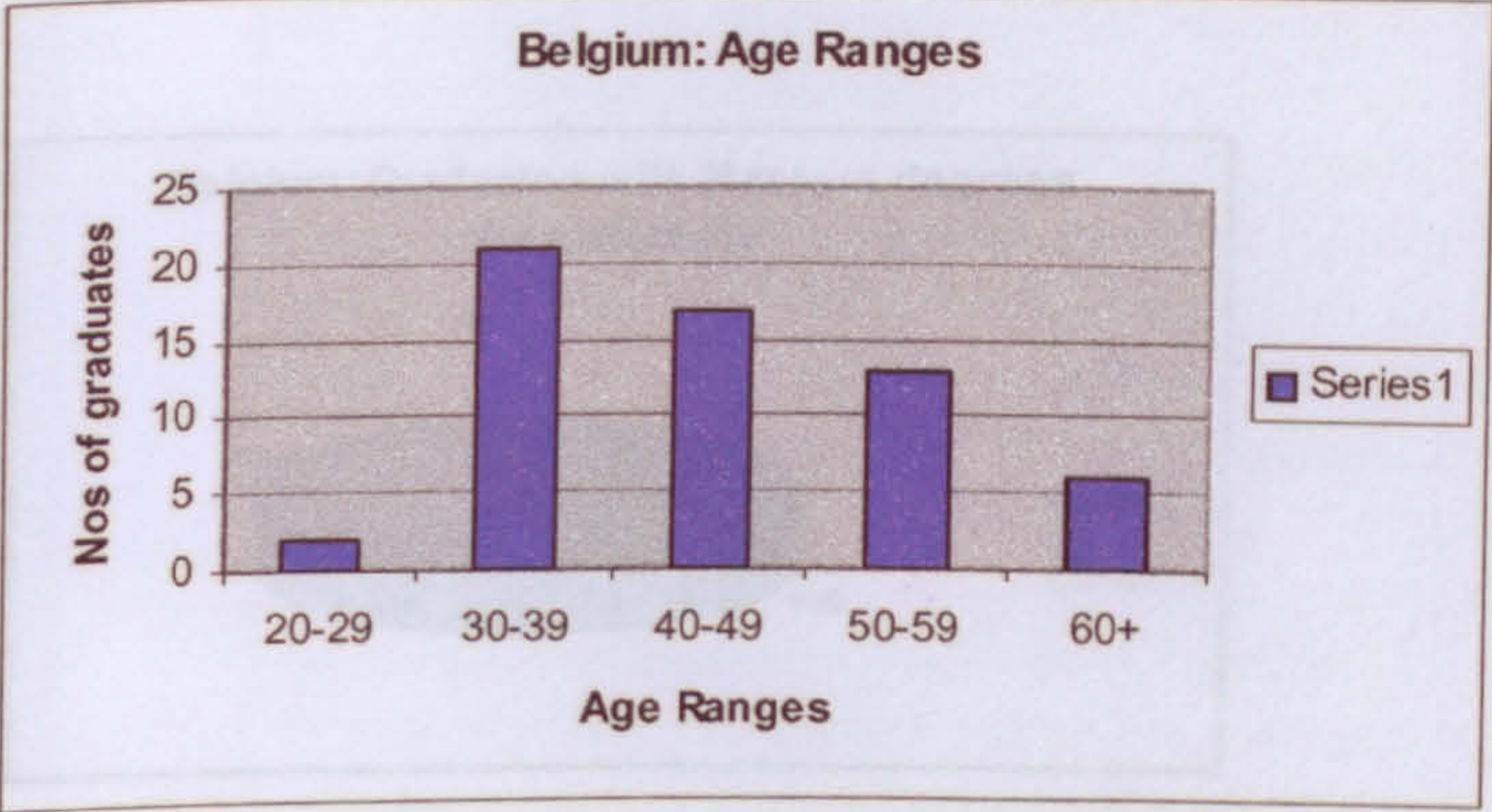
Appendix 7

Length of residence by country



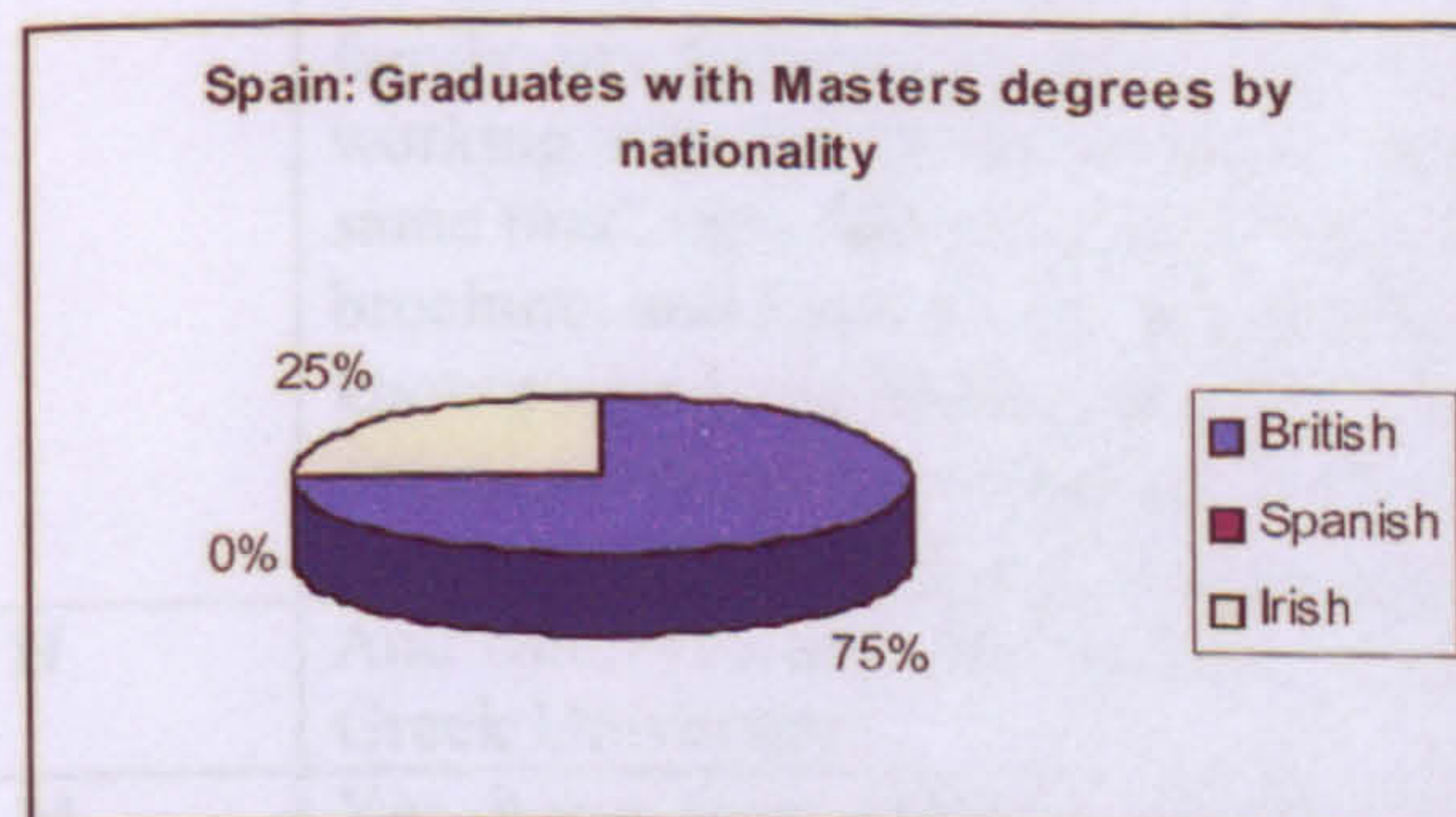
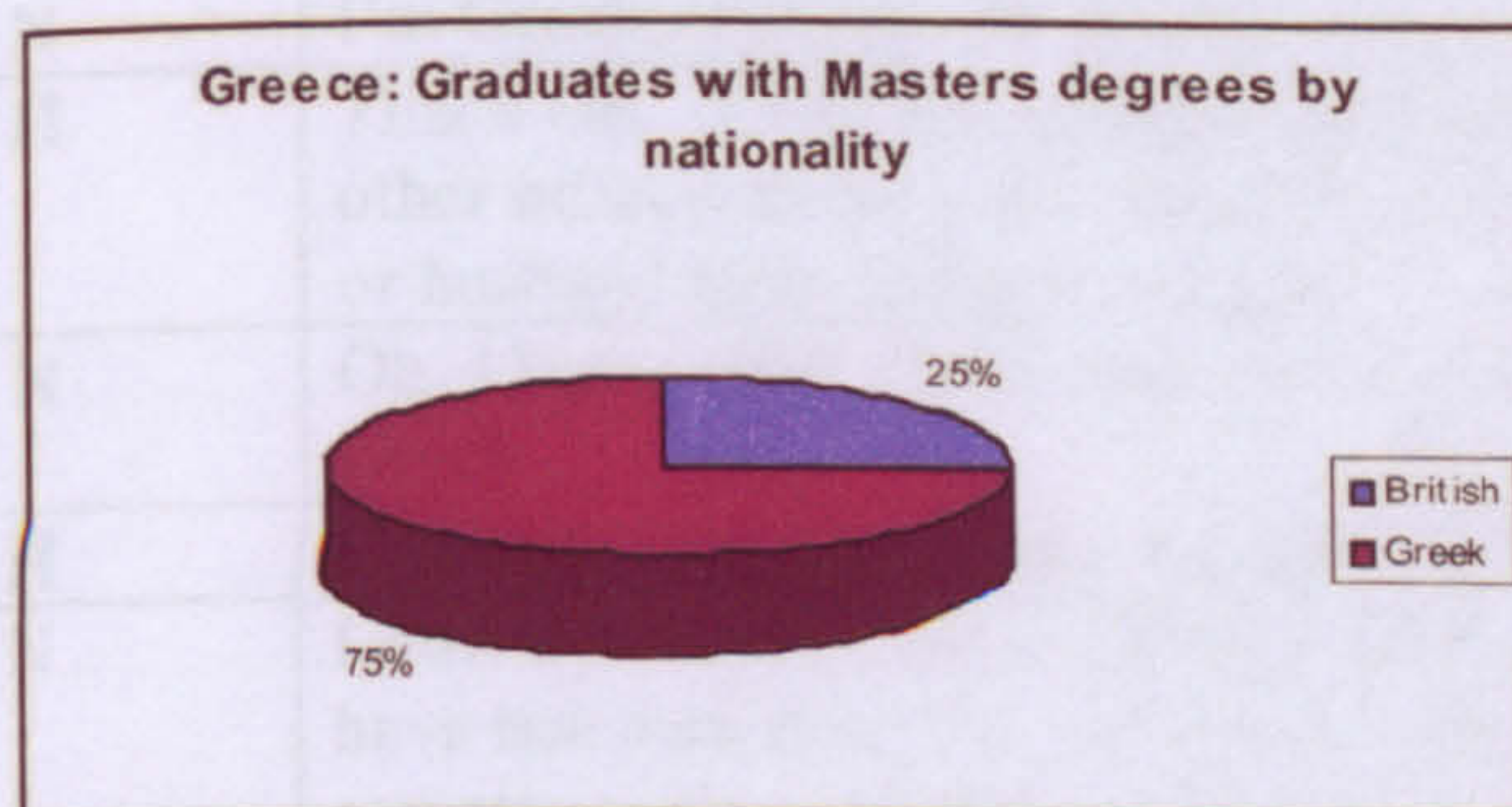
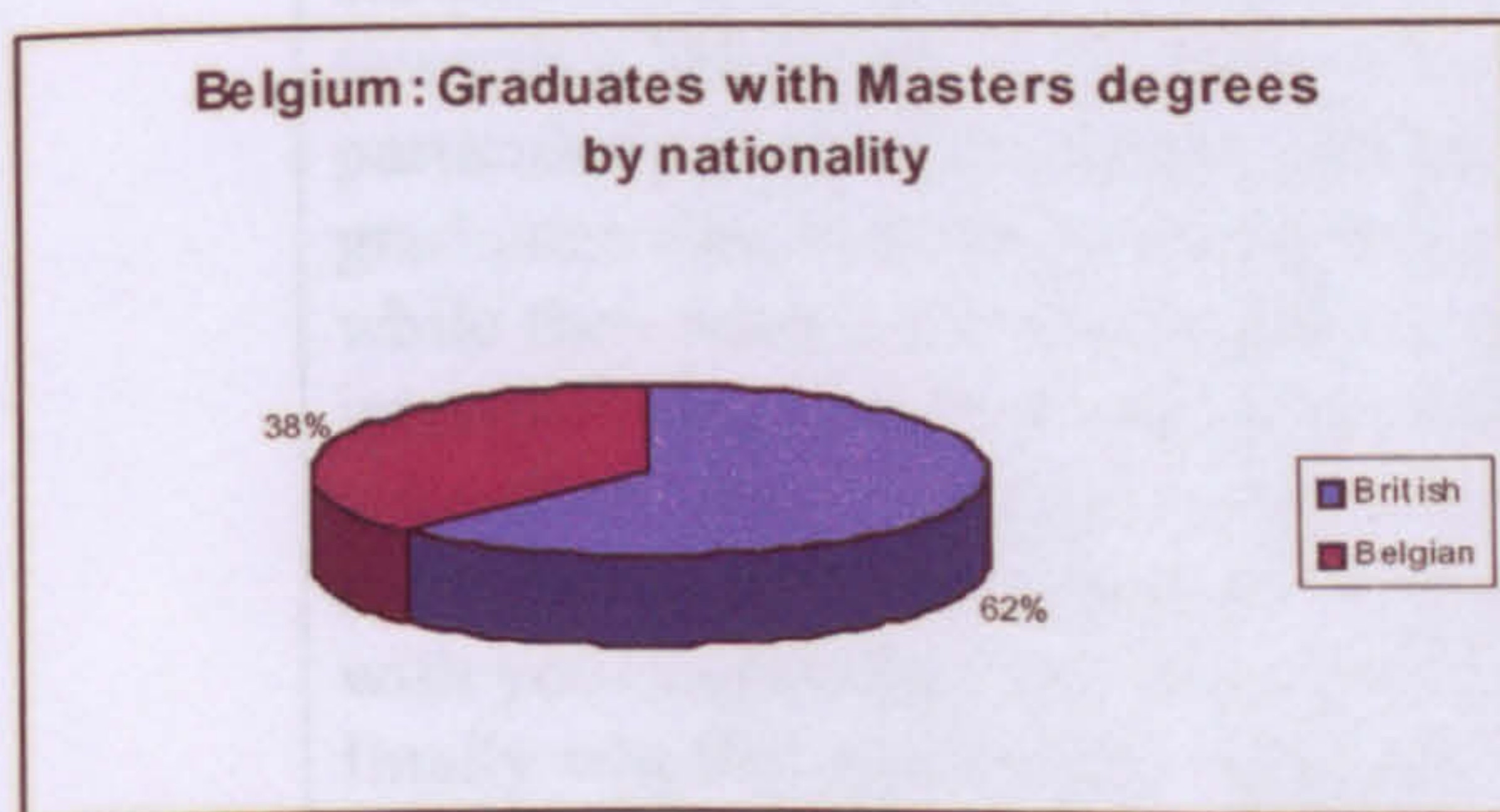
Appendix 8

Age range per country



Appendix 9

Graduates with Masters degrees by nationality



Interview – “Mary” in Greece		
Speaker	Transcript	Notes/Coding
H	Hello Mary. This is Hilary Bennison ringing, as we arranged. Is it OK to talk now? Yes? Firstly can I explain why I am carrying out this interview? I am a student with the Open University and I am studying towards a Doctorate in Education. I am interested particularly in the experiences of Open University graduates who have been living in Continental Europe while they have been studying for a degree. This interview should take about 30 minutes, and I will be asking you about your nationality, your previous experiences of higher education and how these compare with your experiences as a student with the OU, and finally whether you have tried to get your degree recognised in Greece. Does this sound all right with you?	<i>Preamble</i>
M	Yes, fine	
H	First of all, can I ask you how would you describe yourself in terms of your nationality?	IQ1a
N	I’m Greek. I’m not sure what you mean exactly.	
H	That’s OK. I was just wondering whether you had any other influences on your nationality, for example a parent or husband from another country?	<i>Try to draw out fuller answer</i>
N	Oh, I know what you mean now, but no, I am purely Greek	IQ1a
H	Can I ask how you found out about the Open University?	
N	I own a private school of foreign languages, I have to have teachers from abroad, sometimes they are Greek and sometimes they are foreigners, so I had a person from Ireland who is living here with his wife, and he actually talked to me about that. I was telling him how much I wanted to study again, but I hadn’t had the chance after my BA and because I couldn’t leave everything, my family, my business etc to go to Athens. His wife was working with the OU as an Associate Lecturer at the same time, very like you, and I asked him for the brochure, and I saw a very interesting course that I didn’t know existed, the Management for Education organisation, which was exactly what I was without, the theoretical basis, so I was very interested in that.	<i>Self-employed, owns language school</i> <i>Curriculum appealed to her.</i> <i>Professional development</i>
H	And when you say you had your BA, was that from a Greek University?	IQ2a
M	Yes, it was from Athens University. It was in English Literature and English Language, and Linguistics, so it was pretty easy for me to study in English.	IQ2a <i>Experience of Greek HE</i>
H	You have had direct experience of studying in a Greek University, and then you have studied for your Masters in Education with the Open University. Could you identify the main differences between the two institutions, did it feel different to be studying with a British University?	IQ2b

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
M	Well, it was different, perhaps due to the fact that I was far away, I mean it's not the difference between the two universities, it's the difference of the OU itself. Apart from that, I didn't find any difficulties. Perhaps because I was very familiar with my previous studies with English history and cultural changes, I was familiar with English culture and didn't find any big difficulties. The only thing I could mention that was difficult for me was in my first year, doing a Management course, I have mentioned this also in my previous feedback, some of the organisations which are local, which are very well known, in your country. It was again and again in the book, and I had difficulty in understanding what it meant, for example, the LEAs, in your educational system, I had never heard of that. Our Greek system of calling people to work is very very different, we don't have that. It's just an example. As it was a management course I had to know this, the basis, and to understand what the terms meant. There were many names, but they could have put a glossary at the end of the book which explained it. Apart from that I didn't find any great differences that were an obstacle to me.	<p>IQ2b <i>Difference in ODL</i></p> <p><i>Previous study of English Lit and Lang. Accustomed to British culture</i></p> <p><i>Good example of Anglo centricity of course materials.</i></p> <p><i>Suggests a glossary of terms for non-British students</i></p>
H	That's very interesting. Looking specifically at the styles of teaching and learning, could you identify any differences perhaps in the role of the tutor?	IQ2d

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
M	Yes, the role of the tutor was very different. In contrast to being far away, I had the chance to have a tutor for personal use, let's say, I had the chance to contact him/her personally to talk to him, which doesn't usually happen in Greek universities, this was a very good thing, and this was very different. The only thing I could say is that sometimes, and it only happened once or twice, was that my tutor was on holiday for a period of time, and it coincided with a big project I had, or an assignment, and this was very difficult, but perhaps this is something the University could arrange with the tutors, as far as my experience goes, but everyone was very kind and helpful. The whole critical evaluation that was asked, especially at the end of my last course, the Child Development course, was very different and very helpful. I found it necessary in order to have an open eye to theory, because I was used to reading theories, and just learning them by heart, but now I had to really think, and ask myself do I agree with what she is saying, don't agree etc. And also, the reflection on my work experience was very practical. What I learned I was ready to practice it through my work	<p>IQ2d <i>Despite distance, availability of personal tutor with OU seen as an improvement over Greek HE.</i></p> <p><i>Found staff kind and helpful.</i></p> <p><i>Good example of differences in learning styles/rote learning. Found reflection</i></p>

	experience. I found it very useful. It was very difficult in the beginning because you are not used to the ideas, but then you see how helpful they are.	<i>useful in her work</i> IQ3a
H	Is there anything else in the Open University's approach to teaching and learning which you found different?	IQ2c
M	Yes, it is a different approach.	
H	I think one aspect of the approach that the Open University uses is to encourage students to become independent learners and to need less support as they progress through the system.	
M	I think this is the best assessment. If I see a critical evaluation, then I know I haven't understood what I have read. Also the examples are different, and this also proves that the University has a critical approach.	IQ2 <i>Not sure what is meant here – should have probed deeper.</i>
H	Let's talk about the assessment procedure – did you have written exams in the University of Athens?	IQ2e
M	Yes, we have 3 hour exams, but the marking scale is different. We had "out of 10s", but this was not difficult to get used to.	IQ2e <i>Used to written exams</i>
H	Did you have any oral exams in Athens?	IQ2e
M	I didn't but other schools had.	
H	Ok. That's useful.	
M	About the recognition	<i>Student introduces topic of recognition</i>

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
H	Yes, that's just what I was about to go on to – tell me about your experience of recognition	IQ3b
M	Well, it's a sad story! Unfortunately, as far as I know the OU qualifications are not recognised here, there is a public organisation here which you have probably heard of – Dikatsa– and it is responsible for recognising qualifications from foreign universities. I believe the OU falls into the same category as some departments of the university from abroad which offer 2 or 3 years in Greece and the final approach, if you know what I mean, and some of them are not very trustworthy, and I think they believe that the Open University is a private institution the basis that we don't go to the UK. I have that picture, because we don't recognise <i>free</i> universities, I think we have misunderstood that because there are some universities, who take some people, let's say we are the University of Indianapolis, or an American university or anything, sometimes if it happens, they are nothing, and that happens, perhaps they see the OU as something like that, which it isn't, but I think they should be more informed about that, and the irony is that some years ago, there was founded the Open University of Greece, based on your programmes and systems, and this is very well recognised. I think there should be a stronger argument about the nature of the Open University.	<p>IQ3b</p> <p><i>Explanation of why OU not recognised in Greece.</i></p> <p><i>Lack of understanding by Greek authorities of the nature of distance learning and the OU in particular.</i></p> <p><i>Thinks there should be more done to promote OU in Greece</i></p>
H	Yes, indeed. I was led to believe that it was the distance learning nature of the Open University that they didn't like but if they now have their own Open University, surely that argument is	
M	The English one is much older than the Greek one, it's very well organised nationally, so the Greek government take notice of this, but I do think this is going to change.	<p>IQ3b</p> <p><i>Hopeful of change in attitude by Grk govt.</i></p>
H	I hope so and I agree entirely with you – it is a sad and frustrating situation for our graduates in Greece	

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
M	During my second year I was talking to a friend about the value of the Open University, and then one day she told me that my study might not be recognised. All the way through my second year, I didn't know this, and it was a great disappointment.	<p>IQ3</p> <p><i>Only found out about lack of recognition in 2nd yr</i></p>
H	It is a major drawback. In terms of your own major career development, presumably you were always intending to run your own business anyway, or if your degree had been recognised, would you have done different things?	IQ3d

M	Basically, I did this for myself. I always liked studying, and I did this because I wanted to be sure of what I was doing, because I have my own private business and I wanted to be as good as I can, but I don't think I was going to use it at the time I got it, anywhere, because I was self employed, but in the future, I would be happy for it to be recognised, if I needed it. For the time being, I feel that I did it for myself, and nothing else. It isn't recognised, and of course I can say to customers, clients that I have a management degree, which is very nice, if I go to the public sector and work there, I get nothing.	IQ3d <i>Didn't need recognition as self-employed but would need it if she were to work in public sector.</i>
H	I think, as you say, that it is a question of continuing to put pressure on the government, from all directions.	
M	It's a pity the Open University isn't recognised.	
H	I don't know whether you have heard about the Bologna process? All the Ministers of Education in all of the European Union countries have signed an agreement that by the year 2010, they will have a common pattern of education within their countries and they have agreed that a first degree should be three years in length, and then a Masters would require a further two years, so that although the content of degrees would be different, at least it would mean that it should make it easier for people to move from country to country, because their qualifications would be more easily recognised.	IQ3c

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
M	No I hadn't heard about this, I do think things are rapidly changing, and if you are involved with a professional body, and you are exercising a <i>profession</i> , let's say, then you have the right to do that in another country in the EU. It's very interesting. I do hope something will be done about this.	IQ3c <i>Not aware of Bologna process</i>
H	That's been very helpful. I think you have answered all of my questions. Is there anything you would like to ask me at all?	
M	I am always mentioning that I have a degree with the Open University and now I have to take a break, to catch up with things I have neglected. But I loved my experience with the Open University generally, and I have an eye out for jobs with the Open University, and it has become a hobby for me to come to your country, a lovely activity, and if I had the chance, I would love to come to England.	<i>Positive experience with OU – would like to tutor. Enjoys visiting UK</i>
H	Have you thought about going on to the Doctorate in Education?	
M	Well, yes, I have, but it's a big decision and it would take a lot of time, and I have neglected my family a little bit. I	

	had two children whilst I was studying. I had my first child in the first year, and my second child in my last year of study, and my work is in the evening, so I had to come back at 10 pm, and locked myself in the room, and the children shouted outside the door which was a little difficult! So perhaps in the future, I will do the Doctorate, and of course the recognition would help a lot.	
H	That's very helpful, Mary, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me.	
M	Glad to have helped.	
H	Thank you. Goodbye.	

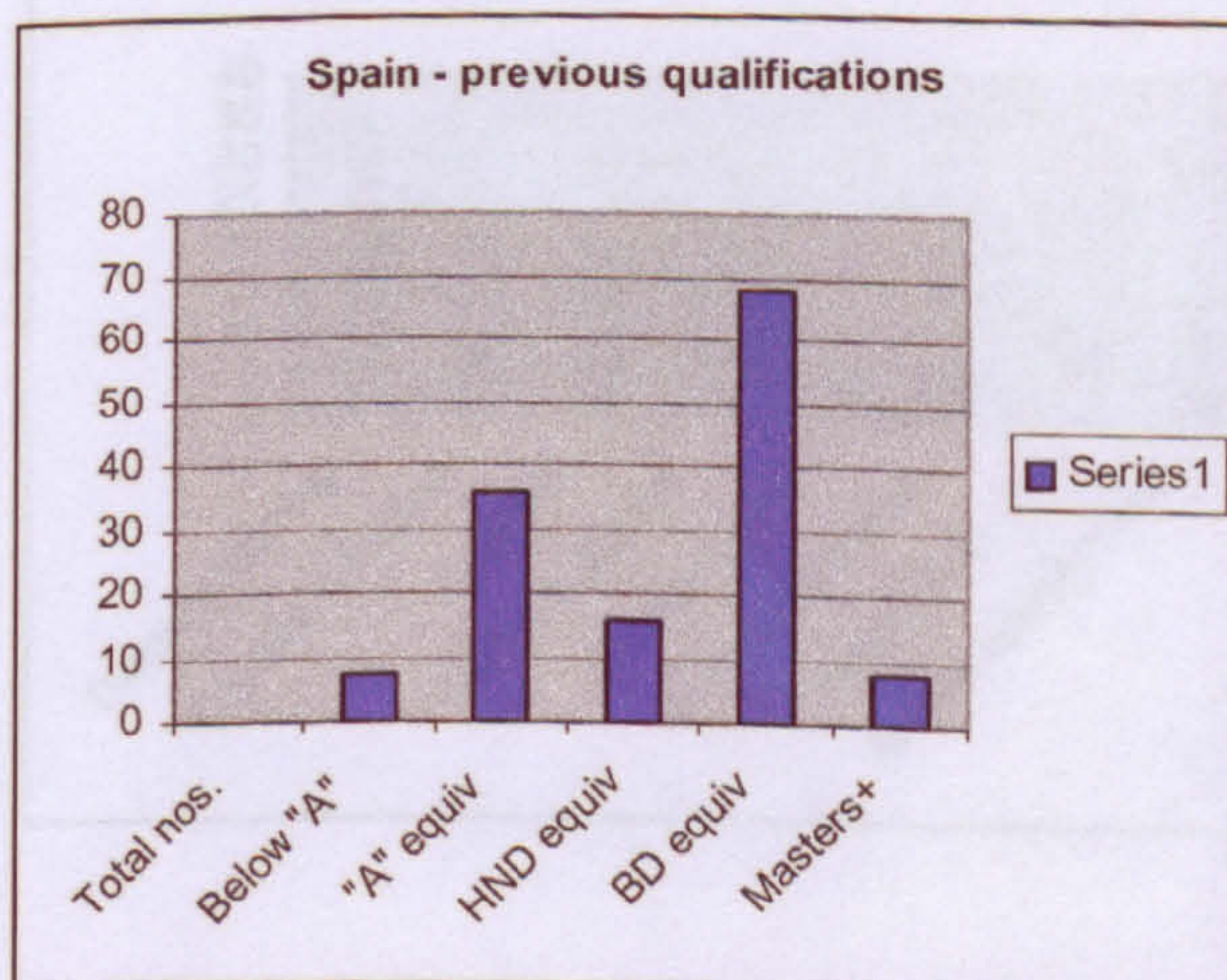
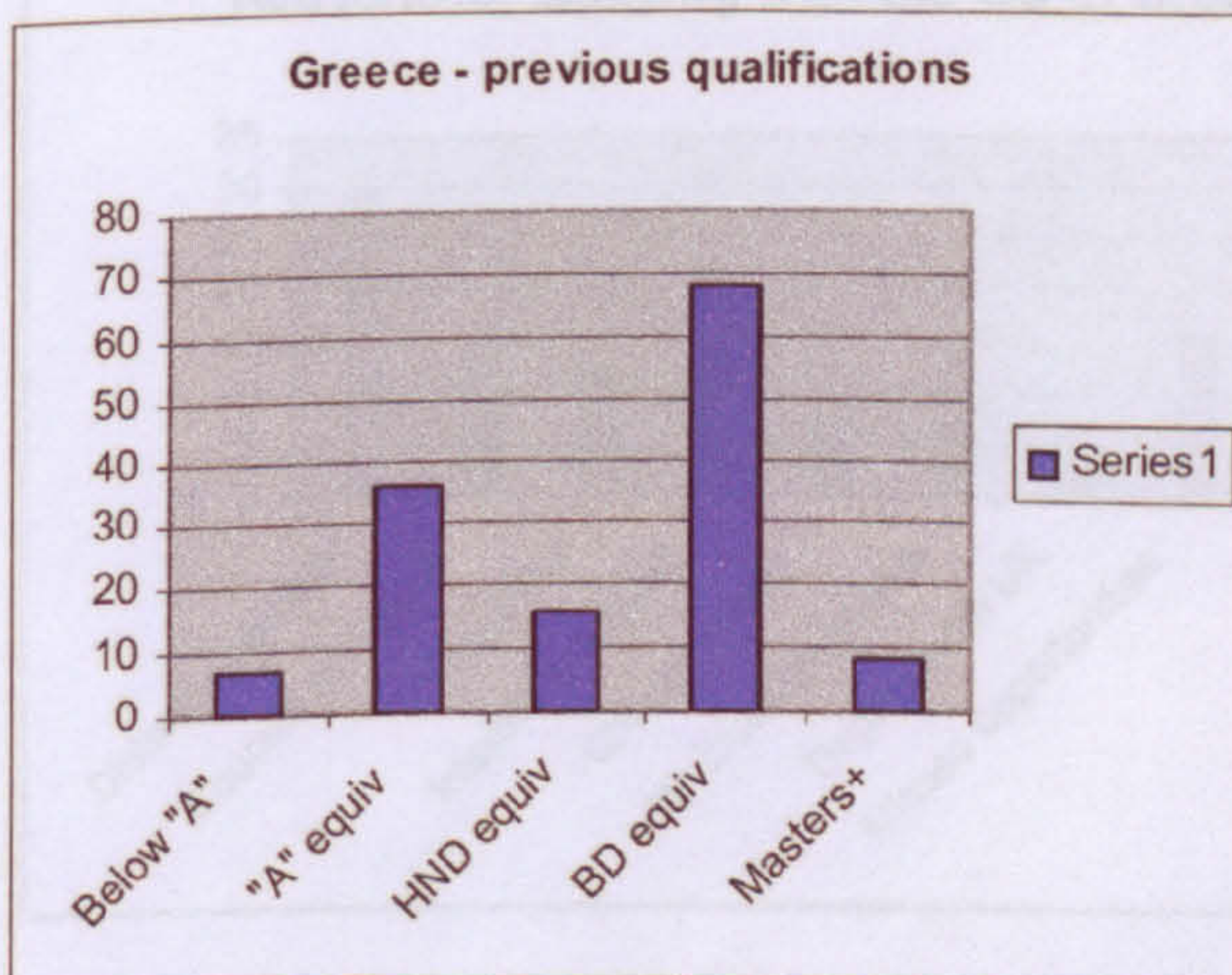
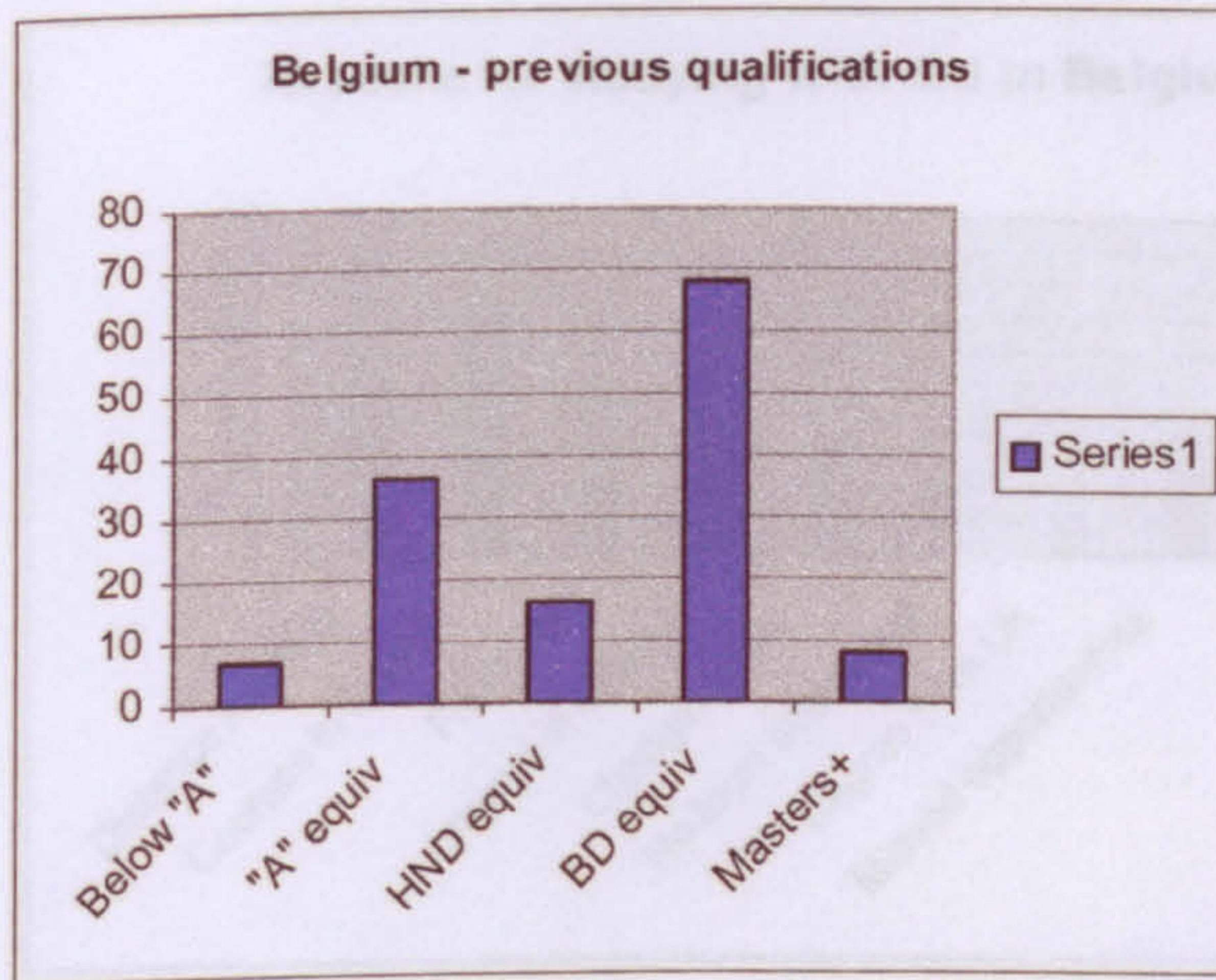
Appendix 11

Interview schedule and coding frame

Questions	Code
Theory Question	
What are the perceptions of national identity among graduates who have studied in a transnational setting?	TQ1
Interview Questions	
How would you describe yourself in terms of your national identity?	IQ1a
Has this sense of identity changed in any way as a result of your studies with the OU?	IQ1b
Theory Question	
How transferable are approaches to teaching and learning across international boundaries?	TQ2
Interview Questions	
Have you had any personal experience of higher education in Belgium/Greece/Spain (or elsewhere outside the UK)?	IQ2a
If so, how did this compare with your experiences of studying with the OU?	IQ2b
Were there any specific issues to do with the OU's approach to teaching and learning which you found different?	IQ2c
What about the role of the tutor?	IQ2d
What about the assessment strategy?	IQ2e
What about the curriculum?	IQ2f
Theory Question	
How transferable are academic qualifications across international boundaries?	TQ3
Interview Questions	
Has your OU degree been of use to you in your career, and if so how?	IQ3a
Have you tried to get your OU degree recognised in your country, and if so by whom?	IQ3b
Have you heard of the Bologna Declaration?	IQ3c
How important is it that your degree is professionally recognised?	IQ3d

Appendix 12

Previous qualifications by country of residence



Appendix 13

Reasons for studying with the OU, broken down by country of residence

